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New York

President: Mr. Ping .... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Romania.

Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Iliescu (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to join others who have warmly congratulated you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I wish you every success in your important undertaking, which will enjoy the full support of the Romanian delegation.

For some years now, this great worldwide gathering has opened in the wake of deadly terrorist attacks that require us to respond as one to voice strong condemnation of all terrorist acts and a commitment to contributing ever more energetically to the affirmation of effective multilateralism that will make global action increasingly effectual.

In that context, I cannot fail briefly to address the issue of the struggle against terrorism, which is more urgent today than ever before. Since September 2001, the level of violence of acts of terrorism — perpetrated in the name of ideological, territorial, religious or ethnic differences and incompatibilities — has risen dramatically.

At the same time, the very nature of terrorist acts has changed. The complexity and scale of such barbarism, claiming the lives of hundreds or even thousands of innocent victims — often children, as in the recent incident in Beslan — are indescribably grim and represent immense challenges. Yet another factor is at play in all this: the increase in the number of terrorist acts. In such conditions, the struggle against that scourge — whose implications are not only immediate, but also complex and global in nature — is an urgent and ongoing obligation for all States.

Romania promptly and meaningfully joined the anti-terrorism campaign and has demonstrated its resolve to contribute to eradicating it. We believe, however, that the struggle to end terrorism must also address its underlying causes, including poverty, and must not be used as a pretext for flouting or violating human rights. If that were to occur, we would be playing into the hands of the perpetrators of terrorist acts, who not only seek loss of life and devastation, but strive above all to destroy symbols and values. On the other hand, promoting respect for human rights and democratic values is the only way to eliminate such manifestations of hatred and violence.

The nature and, above all, the inherent dangers of the current international context make the development of cooperation among all kinds of international actors,

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State and non-State alike, increasingly urgent. As an Organization that is universal by vocation and in legitimacy, the United Nations must fully assume its role as the driving force behind efforts to adapt to changes in the international environment. In an interdependent world, no single State is safe from such dangers or from threats to international peace and security, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the increasing number of States affected by instability, the growth of global disparities, humanitarian crises, ethnic wars and intra-State wars.

Managing such risks requires a comprehensive and coherent approach on the part of the United Nations, including through the promotion of preventive political and diplomatic measures, such as the strengthening of international treaties and conventions on combating terrorism and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; efforts to make international export control regimes and specialized international structures more effective; and, in extreme cases, recourse to coercive measures, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

Our Organization has one strong and complex tool at its disposal in meeting such challenges. I refer to the Security Council, in which Romania is striving to make a real contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security and the establishment of a world climate of stability, with particular emphasis on fighting terrorism, preventing conflicts and humanitarian crisis situations, maintaining the unity of Council members and supporting consensus solutions, and encouraging cooperation on stabilization between the United Nations and regional organizations. With respect to that last issue, I would note that Romania has been and continues to be interested in cooperation between the global Organization and the regional and subregional pillars. Given the current international context, that is of major importance.

(*spoke in English*)

The need to speed up the reform of the United Nations is more urgent than ever. The series of challenges, more or less new, that the Organization has to face in the twenty-first century make its reform a priority if its structures and working methods are to adapt to the present realities. The terms of reference continue to be efficiency, adaptability and progress. Romania looks forward to the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the report of the eminent persons so that we may embrace, together with other States, a collective effort that cannot afford delay.

We hope that the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization's establishment will mark significant progress in the process of adapting the United Nations to the new challenges, and especially the Security Council, the essential body in the management of world peace and stability. Our relation to that organ, as a non-permanent member, increases our conviction that a new configuration, closely reflecting current realities by increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent seats, will consolidate the representative profile of the Security Council and thus its authority and efficiency.

I cannot ignore another aspect of our contemporary world. Both a source of challenges and a most generous framework for opportunities, the phenomenon of globalization is unavoidable and affects us all. Given its nature, the United Nations is ideally placed to manage the phenomenon, particularly by correcting its consequences.

In that context, Romania fully embraces the Global Compact Initiative of our Secretary-General, which needs support and strengthening. All Member States must promote regional and transcontinental integration as vehicles and instruments of a harnessed globalization. In this case, the European Union stands as a success story, since it acts as a vector not only of economic integration, but also of democratic values and human rights. The United Nations has to try to find ways to adjust the rules of the world market in order to diminish, in the medium and long terms, the big gaps that exist between the rich countries and the poor.

Another priority in our efforts to harness globalization is the need to enhance coordination among the specialized agencies and institutions of the United Nations system in their work to ensure the diffusion of information technology at a lower cost. We need to show more determination in our attempts to decrease the gaps in this field, and to guarantee the evolution of less developed countries from a state of marginalization to one catalysed by knowledge-based development.

Allow me to turn now to another essential factor for a better future, one that Secretary-General Kofi Annan also underlined in his introductory speech — the rule of law. The validity of the principles of the

Charter of the United Nations have not only withstood the test of time, but they have also been reaffirmed by a whole new network of international agreements, mandatory standards and norms of action to which States have voluntarily acceded, mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and monitoring commitments.

As a proof of our faith in the international law system, Romania appealed this year for the first time to the International Court of Justice — the main judicial body of the United Nations — to resolve a question of maritime delimitation. Romania also appealed to an international investigation commission to solve the case of an infrastructure works project with cross-border impact on the Bistroe Channel in the Danube Delta. Our appeal concerns the need for close collaboration in order to protect a unique and fragile place, a UNESCO world heritage site.

Our efforts towards an effective multilateralism also involve us in other major issues on the United Nations agenda. Romania has promptly joined, and substantially contributed to, international efforts for the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq, in keeping with its long history of participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations and the provision of assistance in post-conflict phases.

The global vocation and aspirations of my country are closely related to its European destiny. The focus of Romanian diplomacy is therefore oriented towards the democratic stabilization of our neighbouring region and its effective connection to a united Europe. For too long that region has been affected by wars and all kinds of tensions, often acute ones. Under such circumstances, Romania can only support, alongside all of Europe, a boost to democracy, economic development and a long-lasting stabilization of the countries in the region.

At the same time, Romania is ready to contribute to the stability and development of all countries in the Black Sea region. We hope to turn this strategic area — with its close connections to other regions of immense potential, including the Mediterranean Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East — into a cooperation and security zone.

I cannot conclude without making a brief reference to another theme to which Romania attaches particular importance. My country strongly supports concerted action to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In an international context that is often volatile and defined by a growing complexity and increased interdependence, we cannot ignore the necessity for immediate action, using the means offered by our global Organization, in particular the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004).

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Romania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, President of the Republic of Nicaragua

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Mr. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, President of the Republic of Nicaragua, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, President of the Republic of Nicaragua, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bolaños Geyer (*spoke in Spanish*): In the middle of the nineteenth century railroads were built all over the world. Steel at that time was not of such good quality and for that reason wheels sometimes broke, causing accidents and derailments. To avoid those accidents, at every station stop there was a brakeman who walked the length of the tracks, hammer in hand, hammering on the wheels so that any of the wheels that sounded broken could be changed. Years passed and the quality of steel improved, but the brakemen kept hammering on the wheels, heedless of the fact that it was no longer necessary.

The world changes, and that means that we, too, need to change in order to adapt to new circumstances. Something similar is happening in the United Nations. The Security Council, designed after the Second World War to maintain peace in the post-war world, is not the Security Council that the new century of information technology and globalization needs. We must reinvent the United Nations.

Let us begin by making the reform of the United Nations, on which we have already agreed, effective. We have to broaden participation in the Security Council to include other countries, both as permanent members — which at the very least should include Germany and Japan — and as non-permanent members, in order to allow for more equitable and democratic representation.

Our Organization needs to adapt to the new challenges and realities of the present. Development, for example, needs a new approach. What concerns us most is to ensure that populations and individuals participate more actively in the decisions shaping their own future. As I said three days ago, in the "Action Against Hunger and Poverty" meeting of world leaders, development is a responsibility of States, but it is also the primary responsibility of the individual.

I find the words of Nobel Laureate José Saramago are appropriate here when he writes:

> "As vehemently as we claim our rights, let us also lay claim to responsibility for our duties. Perhaps then the world will become a bit better."

So it was a wise thing that our American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, signed in Bogotá in 1948, established that equal to, and as a counterpart to rights, there are also individual responsibilities.

That includes instilling in the conscience of citizens a culture of responsibility. Next to the right to receive a State-sponsored education stands the civil responsibility to make the most effective use of that education and to obtain at least a primary education. Next to the right of children to have a father and a mother stands the duty of parents to care for, help, feed, educate and shelter their young children. Children, for their part, have the responsibility always to honour their parents, help them, feed them and give them shelter when they are in need. Next to the right to employment stands the duty to provide efficient service. Everyone has the responsibility to work, each according to his ability and possibilities, in order to obtain the resources for survival, thus achieving personal progress and social development.

Along with the right to health goes the responsibility to contribute to a healthy and clean environment. With the right to enjoy the benefits of progress goes the responsibility to contribute to development. With the right to the freedom of expression goes the responsibility of tolerating differing opinions. In short, every right has a corresponding duty or responsibility.

With the fall of the Berlin wall, the age in which the State was expected to be responsible for everything came to a close. Today, we must all participate together in the search for new paths for our individual development and for that of our countries and of all humanity.

The passing of time motivates us to renew our basic principles. I therefore propose that we once again adopt an ethic of development based principally on individual responsibility as well as on the responsibility of nations.

The well-being and the development of nations are the result of individual well-being and the development of the people that make up that society. Social well-being should not be measured by how many people are assisted by social programmes financed from national budgets but by how many people leave those programmes because they have become able to manage on their own.

In his book, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind,* Lawrence Harrison defines a negative attitude as a barrier to development and a positive attitude — based on the belief in one's own ability to improve oneself through individual effort — as a driving force of development.

In order to bolster all the elements I have cited, it is essential that the right to accede to public office should be accompanied by the responsibility to carry out one's duties honestly. At the current session of the General Assembly, several heads of State have emphasized the need to fight corruption. It is a responsibility that has rightly been gaining ground.

In Nicaragua, we have undertaken the arduous fight against corruption. First, corrupt bureaucrats have been brought to trial and sentenced, just as is happening in other Latin American countries. Secondly, we have brought before the National Assembly a body of legislation to strengthen our fight against corruption.

Thirdly, we have established a programme for integrity and transparency that prevents corrupt practices in the executive branch and which provides a model for the other branches of Government in undertaking reform and increasing transparency. For example, we have published on the Internet, for everyone to see — for the countries extending assistance, international organizations and the media — both the Republic's national budget and the details of external assistance.

Fourthly, we have undertaken to fight the culture of corruption, including by teaching values and promoting the idea of the individual as the maker of his or her own destiny.

We must work for a United Nations that reaffirms its credibility and authority by taking the appropriate effective collective action. Nicaragua recognizes the importance of the proposals various countries have submitted to this forum, in particular Spain's proposal to reduce external debt in exchange for initiatives for social development, particularly in the area of primary education, and the United States proposal to create a fund for democracy. Nicaragua views with approval that such a democracy fund would be partially allocated to training and support for auditing and judicial entities, given that corruption is the greatest foe of democracy. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan said yesterday, "They notice when we use words to mask inaction". Nicaragua's energy and determination are devoted to those efforts.

Recent world events have demonstrated once again the evil nature of terrorism and how it breaks down the values of humanity and civilization. I reiterate my most sincere condolences to all those countries and individuals around the world that have suffered the effects of terrorism.

I underline that we deplore, to cite only the most recent acts, those who caused the loss of the precious lives of innocent children in the Russian Federation. We also repudiate the attack against the Australian Embassy in Jakarta.

The best way to defeat terrorism is to remain faithful to our values of freedom, dignity and justice. Terrorism rejects those values.

Nicaragua aspires to be elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2006 and 2007. Nicaragua, a founding country of the Organization, has known and suffered the horrors of war and has undertaken the democratization of our nation. It is by virtue of the valuable school of our recent history that we can participate in the Security Council. As I stated in this forum last year, whoever knows the horrors of war can contribute more effectively to preventing it.

I cannot fail to refer to the question of Taiwan's representation in the United Nations. That country, with 23 million inhabitants, has a democratic Government and maintains diplomatic, trade and cooperative relations with many Member States of the Organization. However, paradoxically, it lacks membership. That exclusion is inexcusable.

At the beginning of this session, we heard the sad messages from Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which have suffered the devastating effects of nature. I convey our solidarity, encouragement and hope to those countries and to the victims of natural disasters in the United States, Grenada, Jamaica, Panama, the Bahamas, Cuba, Grand Cayman and other islands of the Caribbean.

This afternoon, I began my address by speaking of the responsibilities of citizens. That is the way for our peoples to attain their hopes, expectations and dreams.

May God bless the United Nations and may God always bless Nicaragua.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Nicaragua for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, President of the Republic of Nicaragua, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, President of the Republic of Burundi

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, President of the Republic of Burundi, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Ndayizeye (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I extend my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your well-deserved election to the prestigious presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I assure you of my entire delegation's unwavering support for you in your noble work.

I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, for his excellent guidance of the work of the Assembly at the fifty-eighth session.

I also take this opportunity once again to congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan on his ongoing dedication and courage in discharging his responsibilities. I thank him for his ever-growing and resolute support for the cause of peace and security throughout the world and in my country, Burundi, in particular.

When the Security Council adopted resolution 1545 (2004) authorizing the deployment of the United Nations Operation in Burundi, the United Nations made a real contribution to the peace process in my country, which two months later is now drawing towards the final phase of that process.

The signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi on 28 August 2000 was a decisive step forward in the peace process in my country, which since 1993 had been devastated by the longest crisis in its history, even jeopardizing the very existence of the nation. The Agreement ushered in a new era of calm and a gradual return to peace with the conclusion of ceasefire agreements with the armed political movements, especially since the signing on 16 November 2003 of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement with the main rebel movement Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces nationales pour la défense de la démocratie.

Today, calm has descended throughout almost all our national territory because we have acted on our firm commitment to implement the agreements. Fully inclusive institutions have gradually been established and we are now preparing to enter the post-transition era with elected institutions, to the satisfaction of our people and that of the international community.

We wish to send the strong message that we are resolved to break the logic of violence and to support the restoration of peace, reconciliation, democracy and development in our country. We also protect and strengthen peace and security by integrating the fighters from the armed movements into the security and defence forces that we will need to establish our national army and police force, to the comfort of all. The process will be complemented by the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and troops not included in the integration process.

The disarmament, demobilization and professional or social reintegration programme is coordinated at the uppermost level by the highest authorities of our country, including the ministries concerned and representatives of the World Bank, the army and the armed movements. The programme is currently in its first phase, bringing the combatants together into agreed zones. Those combatants will very shortly be transferred to the sites identified for their cantonment, while the Government troops will remain in their barracks. We already have in place a precedent for the integration of the forces, having created a special institutional protection brigade on 1 July. Moreover, mixed military units have begun training in a pilot centre with a view to establishing the national defence force. This approach is intended to correct the ethnic and regional imbalances that have often been observed in our country and that have constituted the source of the social and political conflict that has brought us so much suffering.

The demobilization sites are ready, but we face a terrible shortage of material and financial resources to pay for the increase in the numbers of people we will have to handle in the first few years before progressive demobilization ends. We must recall that demobilization and disarmament will make a real contribution to creating a security environment conducive to the organization of free, democratic, transparent and honest elections.

The draft post-transition constitution, which will serve as the basis for organizing the elections, and other legal and administrative texts were discussed at great length among the politicians in the President's circle and at the levels of mediation and heads of State of the subregion. Some provisions on power-sharing that did not enjoy unanimous support were upheld by 20 of 30 political parties and endorsed by the twenty-second summit of heads of State of the subregion. They were then included in the draft constitution, which was adopted unanimously by our Parliament, with a 70-per cent attendance rate, on 17 September. We have scheduled a referendum on the draft constitution for 20 October.

Thus, despite the opposition of some political parties, we believe that Burundi will soon have a post-transition constitution and other legal texts that are customary in democratic countries. We are placing our faith in the Independent National Electoral Commission established to organize the technical aspects of the elections. We would stress that the Commission will succeed only if we obtain the support of our external bilateral and multilateral partners. We sincerely thank those who have already pledged their assistance, and we would urge others to follow suit.

The efforts to maintain peace are still being resisted by the Palipehutu-Forces nationales de liberation movement, which still refuses to come to the negotiating table. Following the movement's involvement in the assassination of Papal Nuncio Monsignor Courtney and in the massacre of Congolese refugees in Gatumba and elsewhere, the summit of heads of State of the regional initiative on Burundi, meeting in Dar-es-Salaam, classified it as a terrorist organization and recommended that the United Nations and the African Union take the appropriate restrictive measures. Here, I would like to urge the United Nations to support the decisions taken at that regional summit and thus to follow the lead of the African Union, which has already responded favourably to that appeal. I also take this opportunity to thank the heads of State of the subregion and the mediators for the support that they have constantly provided to the Burundian peace process.

As everyone knows, security concerns are unfortunately not limited to within my country's borders. The security of Burundi affects that of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania. In the light of that interdependence, an international conference on peace, security, democracy, economic development and regional integration in the Great Lakes region is scheduled for November in Dar es Salaam. That conference will undoubtedly have a positive effect on the countries concerned. I have the firm conviction that it will promote a new dynamic of peace in the entire subregion so that we can bury the hatchet of war and turn resolutely towards the integral and integrated development of our peoples.

The efforts to contain and resolve the many conflicts that continue to shake the African continent are very instructive. First of all, the African countries and the African Union have shown their political will and their resolve to manage their own problems, despite an obvious shortage of resources. Therefore, it is time to call for the substantial strengthening of international support provided to the African Union and for much more active cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations on conflict prevention and the restoration of peace. Moreover, the various approaches have shown us that the quest for peace must be inclusive, not deliberately excluding anyone. That is a sensible and productive approach.

Such joint action is something we hope the Organization can do — particularly now, when multilateralism seems to be recovering from recent difficult ordeals. We must therefore remain united to preserve the cherished ideals bequeathed to us by the founders of the United Nations and enthusiastically reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration.

A much more cohesive and shared action under the banner of the United Nations is thus essential at the present time, marked by the complexity of the challenges we are called to face, such as nebulous international terrorism, which is more of a threat to peace, stability and the safety of our borders than ever before; the risk of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; and prostitution and the illicit trade in human persons, whose effects are both cruel and devastating to human rights, particularly children's rights.

Cohesion undoubtedly implies a carefully planned effort. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. Its conclusions will serve as beacons to us as we seek to humanize international relations and to promote a world of solidarity and development compatible with the environment.

The complexity of the current challenges justifies — now more than ever before — the urgent, long-awaited reform of the Organization. We welcome the steps already taken to streamline the working methods of the General Assembly and the reforms already initiated within the Secretariat with a view to adapting the Organization's internal structures and culture to new expectations and challenges. We hope that the same dynamic will be applied to Security Council reform so that it will soon become a reality.

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals is a challenge for us all. Experts suggest that the efforts already undertaken are not equal to the task. Therefore, we must sharpen our focus by mobilizing more of the necessary resources.

Our moral and historic responsibility to future generations is particularly great in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Entire families have been decimated, millions of children have been orphaned and elderly persons are abandoned, alone and defenceless. It is the family structure that is disintegrating, and that is horrible to see. It is our common responsibility to unite our forces to wipe out this pandemic, which knows no borders and threatens the very survival of the human race. We have no right to fail.

In the economic area, we know the unbearable situation of the peoples in the least developed countries, who are trapped in abject poverty. In that regard, my delegation urges the international community to work together in implementing the Brussels Programme of Action. From that perspective, debt relief, more flexible conditions for joining the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, an increase in official development assistance and the opening up of international markets deserve careful attention.

The international community cannot remain indecisive on the issue of agricultural subsidies in industrialized countries that distort the rules of the game of free competition and considerably reduce the opportunities for poor countries to develop.

Africa has enormous natural resources, yet poverty, diseases and suffering of every kind ravage it more than they do other continents. By forming the New Partnership for Africa's Development, Africans have committed themselves to promoting good political and economic governance — a prerequisite for sustainable development. The priorities are already identified, sector by sector, and the subregional structures are being further strengthened. Yet the success of the efforts currently under way will depend not only on the resolve of Africans themselves, but also on the level of solidarity offered by the international community.

The twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have witnessed important forums in which the world's leaders have made decisive commitments in various areas affecting human security, in the profound sense of the term. Those commitments, which have given rise to much hope throughout the world, have been implemented only partially. It is our hope that the high-level plenary meeting scheduled for 2005 will be able to breathe new life into the implementation of the commitments made, for the happiness and prosperity of present and future generations.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Burundi for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Domitien Ndayizeye, President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Boniface Alexandre, Interim President of the Republic of Haiti

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Interim President of the Republic of Haiti.

Mr. Boniface Alexandre, Interim President of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Boniface Alexandre, Interim President of the Republic of Haiti, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Alexandre (*spoke in French*): It is a pleasure for me, on behalf of the people and the Government of Haiti and on my own behalf, to express to you, Sir, my heartfelt congratulations on your election on 10 June to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth regular session. The outstanding qualities that have won you this distinction undoubtedly constitute a guarantee that our work will progress well. I am convinced that advances will be made in the search for viable and lasting solutions to the different problems confronting the international community. I also wish to express our gratitude to Minister Julian Hunte of Saint Lucia, whose far-sightedness and sense of balance gave decisive weight to his initiatives to give new dynamics to the work of the General Assembly during the last session.

I also want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to reiterate to him, on behalf of the Haitian people, our deepest appreciation for the constant interest that he has shown in Haiti. This is also an opportunity for me to express to you, Mr. President, and to the United Nations family my deepest thanks for the expressions of sympathy towards — and solidarity with — the Haitian people, once again struck by terrible floods on 18 and 19 September 2004.

Since 1945, our Organization has given proof of its capacity for survival and renewal. Nonetheless, the recent course of events in certain parts of the world is of constant concern. The imposing of terror as a form of political expression is completely unacceptable. In this regard, Haiti endorses the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. The spiral of violence, which tragically affects civilian populations here and elsewhere, is an attack on human dignity and on the culture of peace that the United Nations embodies. The United Nations must necessarily play its role in the forefront, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, in the settlement of disputes that threaten international peace and security. The Republic of Haiti wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the ideals and to the principles of universality of our Organization and to the objectives of peace and development to be attained through international cooperation.

While the Republic of Haiti celebrates, this year, the bicentenary of its independence, it has had to request the solidarity of the United Nations to help in the stabilization of the situation in the country, following the events of 29 February 2004. The Haitian people express their appreciation to the Security Council, which, at my request, gave the international community the mandate to help Haiti in the process of political transition by virtue of Security Council resolutions 1529 (2004) and 1542 (2004).

Seven months after the major political events that took place in Haiti, I have come here to bear witness to the hopes that democratic renewal is inspiring in the Haitian population. I am also here to say, on behalf of the Haitian people and their Government, that the Republic of Haiti has never felt as close to the principles and the objectives of the United Nations, which, at the height of our distress, showed its interest in a future of freedom, democracy and collective well-being in Haiti.

On 29 February 2004, in accordance with the principles of the Haitian Constitution and in my capacity as Chief Justice of our Supreme Court, I took my oath as interim President of the Republic. Fifteen days later, a Government of transition was established, with the participation of the political and social forces of the country. The transition over which I am presiding is designed to be inclusive. The democratic process has begun. Political parties are forming, and others are reorganizing themselves. A constant and fruitful dialogue has begun between the authorities of the State, the political class and civil society organizations in the country. In that same spirit, a mutually satisfactory agreement was reached on 18 September between the Government authorities and the representatives of the demobilized military. This thus spared the nation a bloodbath and a pointless fratricidal struggle.

I pledged, before the Haitian nation, to put an end to the political transition that dated back some 20 years. May this transition put an end to the transition. General elections will be organized in 2005. The Government resolutely supports this process, and, on 7 February 2006, I must and will hand power over to a democratically elected President.

I thank those States that made the deployment of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) possible, particularly those that have made or will make contingents available to the mission. I invite MINUSTAH to work more closely with the Haitian authorities for genuine disarmament in the country. It is not admissible that armed groups commit their misdeeds with impunity, without being the least disturbed by the presence of MINUSTAH. The Haitian national police is steadily strengthening. The transitional Government counts on international cooperation to make that strengthening not only quantitative, but qualitative, in terms of training and equipment.

Without the active and sustained support of the international community, the objectives of the transitional Government might not be achieved. That failure would mean a return to anarchy and chaos in Haiti and would be a grave setback to the United Nations.

However, Haiti has a fresh look. All freedoms are guaranteed, international commitments are respected and justice again prevails. Unfortunately, the Government of Haiti and its intentions were recently questioned, following a verdict in which no member of the executive branch had any role whatsoever, and that, in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Republic.

The necessary reform of the Haitian judicial system is clearly an imperative. But it is fundamentally unjust to blame the present Government of brazen interference in judiciary proceedings or to systematically bleed magistrates and the civil servants in charge of establishing the law.

The Government of Haiti is extremely sensitive to the comments and remarks of its friends and partners with whom it is cooperating in all fields of political, economic and social governance; but it refuses to be associated with or connected to decisions that involve only one organ of the State, which acted completely independently, even if those decisions might raise certain questions.

What must not be forgotten is that I am still President of the Court of Appeals, provisionally exercising the function of President of the Republic. Therefore, I cannot tolerate any arbitrary action, nor can I tolerate any interference of the political authority in the judiciary system. Justice must be independent.

Guaranteeing security, promoting freedom and human dignity, promoting economic growth and social development, preparing the provisional electoral council for the holding of honest, credible and clean elections — those are the objectives that the Government of Haiti intends to achieve through its programme of action, within the current climate of exceptional difficulties.

For that reason, I make a solemn appeal from this rostrum to the international community, to friendly countries, to the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, and to all of those for whom solidarity is not just word that special attention, beyond symbolic gestures, be given to the Republic of Haiti so that a substantial and well-directed cooperative effort may help mobilize the necessary resources, with a view to immediate and long-term action, and may promote the return of sustained growth in Haiti following years of stagnation.

The people of Haiti are starting anew, and it is natural that at this time they should turn to the United Nations. Based upon the values and objectives that we share, Haiti seeks the understanding of its natural partners so that it can at last break the infernal cycle of violence and isolation in which it has lived for too long.

The President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Interim President of the Republic of Haiti for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Boniface Alexandre, Interim President of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo, President of the Republic of Guatemala

The President *(spoke in French)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guatemala.

Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo, President of the Republic of Guatemala, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Perdomo (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to Mr. Julian Hunte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, for his accomplished and skilful leadership of the General Assembly during its previous session.

I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

I would also like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the great wisdom that he has shown in the discharge of his functions. He deserves our respect and appreciation, and we extend to him our support and solidarity.

My country has reached a crucial point in its history. It faces the challenge of living up to the expectations raised by the end of the internal armed conflict. Since January, when I assumed office, the frustrated hopes of all of our people have been rekindled.

My plan of government is predicated on the peace agreements and defines their implementation as a commitment of the whole nation. As President of

Guatemala, I endorse fully the principle that a firm and lasting peace must be based on participatory socio-economic development, aimed at achieving the common good and responding to the needs of all of our people, particularly those still living in extreme poverty.

Since I took office, I have made a point of listening to the opinions of all of our citizens. That has enabled me to identify the constraints facing Guatemala, which it must overcome if it is to deal adequately with the many legitimate social demands and expectations.

The actions that my Government intends to take in the period 2004 to 2008 will focus on four areas: social investment; conditions of production; environmental sustainability; and security for all. Those policies are being carried out within the framework of the principles of solidarity and inclusiveness; decentralization and participation; and transparency in public actions. Those areas of action and principles accord fully with the Millennium Development Goals.

I would like to single out a number of achievements resulting from our new approach to government. We have reduced our troop strength by 43 per cent and have begun to modernize the armed forces and to make them more professional, consistent with the functions that they are required to perform in time of peace. This includes, at the international level, greater participation by the Guatemalan army in United Nations peace operations, for example in Haiti.

In terms of public spending, we are according priority to education, health, security, citizenship and infrastructure.

We are fighting petty crime, gang-related crime and organized crime, focusing in particular on combating drug trafficking, terrorism, smuggling, money laundering, trafficking in persons and the illegal arms trade, all of which represent a huge challenge that cannot be overcome without the support of the international community.

We are waging an all-out war against corruption, and creating mechanisms to ensure transparency in public procurement and contracting. For the first time in the history of our country, charges of corruption are being investigated, and those found guilty will be prosecuted.

We have adopted a series of measures aimed at elaborating and implementing a fiscal pact. Sustained efforts are being made to meet the taxation goals set out in the peace agreements, within the framework of my Government's objectives for economic growth.

We have, as a matter of priority, established a national front against hunger and malnutrition. Working with civil society, we have elaborated a policy on food and nutritional security.

We have consolidated our responsible approach to macroeconomic management; that is necessary if we are to promote competitiveness and productive investment and ensure the well-being of all Guatemalans. In this context, we launched a programme for economic and social recovery, entitled *Vamos Guatemala*.

We have taken firm measures to eliminate extreme poverty and reduce social exclusion, while fully respecting our diversity — for Guatemala is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country.

My Government is committed to full respect for human rights. We believe that every Guatemalan should enjoy basic rights and fundamental freedoms, and that the right to development must be ensured. In this context, Guatemala will cooperate with international bodies that promote and protect human rights.

My Government's foreign policy is consistent with its national interests. Our guiding principle is the need to ensure that Guatemala can take its proper place in today's globalized world, as well as to strengthen multilateralism and regional integration.

The presidents of the Central American countries have given greater impetus to our integration process. This year, we took the decisions required to bring to fruition a customs union between El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

My Government is proposing a new beginning in its bilateral relationship with Belize. We must reach a permanent, just, equitable and honourable settlement of the territorial dispute between the two countries, while at the same time making a constructive effort to resolve the socio-economic problems afflicting our peoples. That is why my Government is promoting joint projects relating to production, a trade agreement, greater flexibility in the transit of persons, goods and services, full observance of human rights and the conclusion of agreements for mutual legal assistance, all of which will contribute to the progress of our peoples and to the security of the region.

The Central American countries have just concluded trade negotiations with the United States. Last May, at the Guadalajara Summit, an announcement was made regarding the initiation of a process leading up to an association agreement between Central America and the European Union, to include a free trade agreement. We will shortly be signing a trade agreement with Colombia, and we hope to conclude free trade agreements with Taiwan, MERCOSUR, the Andean Group and the Caribbean Community.

Looking after the interests of Guatemalan emigrants is also a priority issue for my Government. We provide support for them as they seek solutions to their problems and respect for their fundamental rights. We are in contact with the receiving countries, particularly the United States of America, with a view to regularizing the situation of emigrants, who make a substantial contribution to the well-being of their communities.

All the efforts that Guatemala is making to overcome poverty and achieve socio-economic development necessarily depend on the progress being made in multilateral trade negotiations. Guatemala appeals to the international community to fulfil its longstanding commitments to eliminate all the measures and practices that distort markets, to liberalize trade in our products and, more generally, to adopt measures enabling a country like Guatemala, which has been striving to open its economy, to obtain better opportunities for access to markets for its exports.

May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), which, after 10 years of fruitful work, is reaching the end of its mandate. MINUGUA has left an important legacy in our country.

I would like to turn now to our agenda at this session. We are convinced of the need to adapt the Organization to the new challenges, threats and changes that humanity faces. We trust that 2005 will offer us an opportunity to react to them in a responsible manner.

One of the most timely issues is the reform of the Security Council. Our position thereon has been evolving, reflecting the imperative need to make that organ more representative, transparent and effective. We advocate the expansion of its membership and could agree to such an expansion being applied to both categories of members — permanent and non-permanent — so long as the need to ensure adequate geographic representation is taken into account. The reform of the Security Council would be the point of departure for the adaptation of all the organs of the United Nations to the new circumstances. We favour the strengthening of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

We reiterate our complete repudiation of all forms of terrorism. We are taking all feasible measures at the national level against the scourge and support the collective action of the international community to combat it, inter alia, through the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1390 (2002), as well as participation in the relevant treaties.

We are convinced of the need for a stronger collective capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts. We believe that the United Nations should continue to address the imperative of development, including such emerging issues as transnational migrations. We also feel that our Organization should play a vital role in seeking to ensure that the benefits of globalization are widely distributed among all countries. In that connection, we wish to highlight the significance we attach to the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Action.

Guatemala is conscious of the divisions that persist in the Middle East, Asia and Africa among neighbouring countries. We earnestly hope that the disputes between them can be resolved through dialogue and other peaceful means, thus enabling all peoples of the world to be represented here without rejection or discrimination.

I wish to note in particular our concern over the situation of the 23 million inhabitants of the Republic of China on Taiwan, whose aspirations to representation in international bodies remain unfulfilled. We also wish to voice our earnest hope that the difficult situation prevailing in the Middle East, which has deteriorated of late, will be resolved in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1402 (2002).

Under your guidance, Sir, this Assembly will have to address issues of the greatest significance for humankind and the United Nations. Guatemala undertakes to participate actively in this year's debates and in the special event to be held just before our next regular session. We hasten to offer our cooperation with a view to the success of your endeavours.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guatemala for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Saca González (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my great honour to represent the Salvadoran people as I address the United Nations, the supreme global forum, for the first time.

I wish to convey my sincerest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to coordinate the work of this session. We also thank Mr. Julian Hunte for his outstanding leadership of the last session of the General Assembly.

To the Secretary-General, we reiterate our admiration and our respect for his leadership in the fulfilment of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter at a time when the Organization is confronting growing and complex global challenges affecting international peace and security.

Internal and international conflicts, terrorism and transnational organized crime, the persistence of extreme poverty, environmental deterioration and unresolved development problems are global in nature and require a harmonizing centre that can support the efforts of the international community to find shared and consensual solutions in order to establish an international order that responds to the needs and aspirations of humankind.

That integrating centre must be the United Nations. We therefore support the establishment of the panel of eminent persons to make recommendations on collective security and the strengthening of multilateralism in order more effectively to confront global challenges.

Irrational and criminal terrorist acts have highlighted the need for us to unite in our efforts and our determination, regardless of the differences that may exist among States, to unify our views and adopt collective action to find ways to confront the phenomenon and its causes, in the framework of respect for international law.

The delegation of El Salvador reaffirms its full conviction that global terrorism is not an issue between cultures or nations. From that perspective, the Government of El Salvador has decided to respond to the United Nations appeal by participating in the work of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance in Iraq.

By its very nature, our presence in Iraq deserves an additional explanation. We are not there for military reasons. Ours is a considered response to the appeal launched by this Organization for the international community to help in the transition phase leading to the full establishment of authority based on the free will of the Iraqi people, with absolute respect for its territorial integrity, its own culture and its unquestionable right to define its own destiny.

El Salvador suffered a long internal war and succeeded, with the support of the international community and the United Nations, in achieving lasting peace. We believe that the time has come to make our testimony and accumulated experience, both during the political negotiations for peace and the peace-building phase, available to other peoples.

El Salvador reiterates its firm and resolute support for peace-building and peacekeeping operations, above all because we have enjoyed the benefits of such an operation, but also, of course, because of their positive results in various regions of the world. On the basis of that conviction, our country has signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations, the best evidence of El Salvador's commitment to such activities, which are so necessary in today's complex and unquiet world. We have presented a list of resources that are available to the world Organization as a basis for our participation in future operations, in addition to those in which we are already participating.

In that context, in order to demonstrate our spirit of cooperation on these issues, I am pleased to announce my Government's interest in submitting its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council so as to make our accumulated experience available to this Organization.

Since the successful conclusion of our internal conflict, El Salvador has focused its attention resolutely on human development. The Government I lead, by dint of a broad majority vote of the Salvadoran people on 1 June, is one of openness and inclusion, with a vision of national integration and service to the interests and aspirations of our people. Such vital questions as security, employment, the effective improvement of basic services and the productivity of our communities and regions are the top priorities of our governing programme.

We are focusing on transforming national education, on reshaping public health care, on significantly strengthening the rule of law, on combating crime in all its manifestations and at all levels, on reactivating the economy and on making Salvadoran society internationally competitive. Insofar as we achieve greater progress domestically, we will be competitive externally.

In addition, however, we are working on a social plan geared towards reducing extreme poverty in the next five years. To that end, we are undertaking a tax reform that will increase tax collection and reduce evasion, allowing us to obtain the additional funds necessary to implementing our social plan. We shall levy a special tax on tobacco, alcohol, weapons and ammunition in order to promote a special health care fund with which we will expand health assistance to the rural areas of our country and undermine the black market in those goods.

In the approximately 100 days that we have been in office, we have undertaken important health reforms by extending medical coverage to the age of 12 for the children of workers who contribute to Salvadoran social security and by granting emergency paediatric services to almost 400,000 boys and girls.

We know that no Government effort will be effective without the cooperation of all sectors in our country. We are therefore launching a mechanism of understanding with all our political and social forces. In that context, we have established an employment agreement that seeks solutions, together with private enterprise, for strengthening the agriculture, construction, tourism and micro-, small and medium-sized business sectors, with the aim of generating more jobs.

One of the best mechanisms for increasing our development potential is investment in education. In that awareness, we have launched the National Education Plan 2021, which seeks to reinvigorate our vision of the future of education through short-, medium- and long-term programmes. We hope that our national effort will also enjoy international cooperation. That is why we were pleased by the decision taken by the Government of Spain to provide assistance for primary education.

The most urgent of the challenges confronting Salvadoran society is that of providing security to our citizens. In order to meet that need, we recently established a rural police force, along with a uncompromising plan to eradicate delinquency in urban areas overrun by gangs. The plan also offers special programmes for young people who wish to abandon the path of crime.

El Salvador unreservedly shares the interests expressed at the International Conference on Financing for Development. We reiterate our dedication to seeking alternative ways and means and renewed commitments to making the fight on poverty more effective — an objective that is interlinked with peace and security in the modern world.

In that vein, we welcome the initiative of Brazil, France, Chile and Spain confirming the need, in the fight against hunger and poverty, for greater and more effective efforts to place stability and global security on a solid foundation. If we all apply our will and commitment, we can develop new programmes and identify innovative public policies that will allow us to achieve the Millennium Goals.

Throughout its history, El Salvador has been a country of emigration. The flow of emigration was intensified by the war, and today virtually one third of our population lives abroad. Maintaining and deepening links with the country of origin is one of the main policies of our administration. Our national reality requires us to integrate the views of Salvadorans abroad with local expectations. The economic impact of this phenomenon is decisive to our life as a nation, but equally or even more important is the sociological and cultural impact of the situation. The phenomenon of transculturization experienced by our society is changing El Salvador forever.

The contribution of migrants to their countries of origin and to their host countries deserves special attention from the international community, and particularly from the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. The transfer of remittances is a key element in the mobilization of resources for the eradication of poverty and the attainment of the Millennium Goals. The reduction of the cost of remittances should be a concern of the international community. From that standpoint, I am pleased to express our great interest in participating actively in the high-level dialogue on international migration and development, to be held in 2006.

We welcome the United States proposal to create a fund for democracy. In the same vein, El Salvador welcomes the General Assembly's proclamation of 2005 as the International Year of Microcredit. The proclamation can promote the strengthening of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, which represent a broad spectrum of the social fabric and help sustain national progress.

In today's world, globalization has put us all on the map of international reality. It promotes the dynamic of strategic alliances in trade and all other fields, and makes it possible to build models for development by comparing them with other experiences. Gradually and in a balanced manner, we have decided to strengthen our links of cooperation with various developed countries. The prevailing regionalization makes us all dependent on one another. In the case of countries such as ours, the situation leads us to nurture our energies and creativity, open markets, promote financial flows, facilitate the transfer of technology and encourage competitiveness. These are major opportunities and challenges that we must all accept.

While cooperation for development remains fundamental, El Salvador reiterates the urgent need for a system of multilateral trade that is open, fair, rule-based, foreseeable and non-discriminatory, in accordance with the objectives of the Millennium Declaration.

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized and therefore increasingly interdependent, economic phenomena affect us all in a chain reaction. The current international energy situation has a significant impact on the economies of our countries, with a negative effect on the dynamics of growth and progress. Thus, from this United Nations rostrum we strongly urge that we explore, as an organized community, not only short-term avenues for overcoming the crises, but also structural remedies that can help the most vulnerable countries, in particular. It is contradictory to talk about combating poverty and hunger while the consumer countries are paying such high prices for petroleum.

The complex Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a source of enormous concern to our country, given the incessant violence, the lack of control over terrorist groups and the ever-growing difficulty of returning to dialogue and political understanding. Our country reiterates, as it has done consistently, its support for any effort and measure to open space for a negotiated political solution that takes into account the legitimate interests of the parties directly involved.

As for the Republic of China on Taiwan, that is a case which the community of nations must examine in the light of international realities. Resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 1971 did not resolve the issue of the representation of the Taiwanese people in the United Nations. That nation has developed politically, economically and socially in an independent, free and democratic way. It has its own institutions and characteristics, just like any other State of the international community. However, Taiwan's situation in the international community is exceptional, because its absence from this forum is a denial of the exercise of the rights that are recognized to other peoples and of the universal and democratic nature of our Organization. Our delegation therefore supports consideration of the exceptional situation of the population of the Republic of China on Taiwan and its eventual participation in this forum and other international organizations.

Our Organization has played, is playing and will continue to play a decisive role in maintaining the world's healthy balance. Reality is changing constantly. Many things have been left behind and many things await us. Institutions in all areas and at all levels must evolve with the changing times. In that vein, we associate ourselves with those who are committed to the structural renewal of the United Nations. We believe that such reform must encompass the highest structures, including the Security Council.

Every year, the nations of the world, through their representatives, attend this rendezvous with the destiny of the world. We have the responsibility to do nothing less than to build a better world for current and future generations. Every word, every gesture and every decision made or reached here must be aimed at that lofty purpose. Only if we combine our efforts can a new, safer, fairer, more peaceful and more sharing reality emerge. Together with all the nations represented here, El Salvador takes up the challenge of joining in that concert of constructive wills, in the confidence that the god of nations will illuminate and encourage us so that we may fulfil his will for peace and brotherhood in a world in which no one is left behind.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia.

Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

Chairman Bryant: It is an honour for me to stand here today to address the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

When, in 1945, Liberia joined the efforts to establish this Organization in order to bring an end to a global war and to pursue justice and maintain world peace, little did we know that we had subscribed to an insurance policy that, 59 years later, would provide coverage for Liberia and redeem its people and its sovereignty.

As members know, Liberia is a country in transition from continued crisis to sustainable peace. The United Nations, the United States and the European Union have all worked with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to stabilize the situation, attending to the humanitarian crisis and navigating the difficult road to peace. We remain immensely grateful for the role of South Africa and ECOWAS for providing regional leadership in the search for peace in Liberia. The pivotal roles played by both the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Ghana deserve special commendation. We are particularly grateful to Secretary-General Annan and the United Nations, the United States and the European Union for partnering with ECOWAS in these endeavours.

I am pleased to inform this Assembly that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement singed in Ghana in August 2003 continues to guide the Liberian peace process. A power-sharing National Transitional Government comprising all warring factions, political parties, and civil society is working. The ceasefire agreement signed on June 17, 2003, continues to be insured by the 15,000-strong United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), operating with a Chapter VII mandate. The force is now disarming and demobilizing all armed groups.

At the beginning of the United Nations Mission in October 2003, we estimated that some 38,000 combatants would have submitted themselves to the disarmament and demobilization program. Today, 73,600 fighters have been disarmed. Over 22,000 pieces of serviceable weapons of all kinds have been surrendered and decommissioned, and more than

5 million rounds of ammunition collected and destroyed by UNMIL.

Meanwhile, the high number of combatants disarmed and demobilized has overwhelmed our capacity to rehabilitate and reintegrate them. The absence of social infrastructures exacerbates the situation. War-related damage to the national infrastructures and community facilities is extensive. Without exception, all communities have lost their capacity to accommodate and support even the slightest caseload of returnees.

Some of the ex-combatants have enrolled in civil works programmes sponsored by UNMIL, the European Commission, the United States Agency for International Development and the People's Republic of China. A significant number are seeking readmission into regular academic programmes. Others are enrolling in vocational training institutions to acquire life skills.

There are special efforts being made for children and female former fighters to receive specialized care and training through programmes sponsored by United Nations agencies and other international and local non-governmental organizations.

As a direct result of the civil conflict, a sizeable number of Liberians are currently residing outside of the country, mostly as refugees. As disarmament nears completion and as our Government extends its authority, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is preparing for organized repatriation of Liberians. In addition, some 500,000 internally displaced persons are expected to commence leaving their camps and returning to their local communities towards the end of October this year.

The role the United Nations is playing to bring sustainable peace and human dignity to our country and people is phenomenal and indicative of the new challenges which the United Nations and the international community must face and meet head on if we, the people of the United Nations, are to live in peace and enjoy our inalienable rights. Peace and the freedom to enjoy those rights under the rule of law require not just curative measures, but preventive actions to address the problems of poverty, ignorance and disease of the world's poorer peoples and countries.

The National Transitional Government's recovery agenda has as its focus the improvement of the well-being of our people by the creation of employment opportunities to put returnees and ex-combatants to work. Our recent history teaches us that when ex-combatants are not meaningfully rehabilitated and reintegrated and that when many in our society are not stakeholders and are excluded, we run the risk that they will return to violent crime and conflict. We are extremely worried about that prospect.

Against that background, there is now real urgency to revive our economy and create jobs. That is why, in June of this year, I pleaded with the Security Council to lift the sanctions imposed on diamonds and timber — two sectors that hold great potential for job creation and economic recovery. Sanctions continue to hurt Liberia. It must not be forgotten that the sanctions were imposed primarily because Liberia was exporting conflict by trafficking in arms for diamonds. A related reason was the lack of transparency and accountability in the management of State resources, especially from the forestry sector and the maritime programme. That situation no longer obtains.

Our Government is not buying arms. To the contrary, we are disarming tens of thousands of combatants. We are also cooperating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Commission and the United States Treasury and State Departments in putting into place proper mechanisms for transparency and accountability in the use of State resources.

In that regard, the European Commission is funding the systems audit of five revenue-generating agencies and the Central Bank of Liberia. The World Bank is working with the Government to reform the public procurement system and is assisting the Liberia Petroleum Refinery Corporation to put into place a system of international competitive bidding of petroleum products. The IMF is assisting the Central Bank to introduce transparency in the management of the foreign exchange regime. The United States Treasury Department is engaged with us in financial sector reforms, particularly in the areas of monetary policy, revenue enhancement, budgeting and expenditure controls. Also, the United States State Department is working with the Forestry Development Authority in implementing an environment-friendly forestry reform programme.

Given all these efforts, we once again appeal to the Security Council to lift the sanctions to enable us to create jobs and to attend to the enormous social needs of our people.

In early February, the United Nations, in collaboration with the World Bank and the United States Government, co-hosted a donors conference for Liberia. The aim of the conference was to seek support for our two-year reconstruction plan. The international community responded generously with pledges of $520 million. I am happy to report that, to date, $455 million of those pledges have been classified as firm commitments. Projects are under way to spend those funds and to bring much needed relief to our people.

Elections in Liberia are not new, but most have been characterized by widespread rigging. Thus, unfair elections in themselves have been a major source of conflict in Liberia. This time around, Liberians are determined to undertake free and fair elections as an equity participation in the investment of sustainable peace and national renewal. The Transitional Government remains committed to the holding of elections in October 2005 and to the smooth transfer of power to a democratically elected Government in January 2006.

Liberia has developed strong collaborative efforts with our neighbours in the Mano River Union to end the activities of armed non-State actors. The Mano River Union countries have committed themselves to strictly adhering to the Non-Aggression and Security Cooperation Treaty of the Union and the meticulous implementation of the fifteenth protocol. Liberia reiterates its commitment to cooperating with all provisions on security and peace as enshrined in the charters of the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Mano River Union.

We call on the United Nations to urgently engage in crisis prevention and in strengthening the peace in our region. In that regard, we urge this body to work with regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union and ECOWAS.

Today more than ever before, the utility of the United Nations is being tested. Never before has the world faced so many different types of conflicts in so many different places at the same time. However, we are encouraged by the fact that the high number and complexity of those problems have not lessened the determination of Member States to stay the course of fostering international peace and stability.

The threat posed by global terrorism, combined with widespread poverty, especially in developing countries, constitutes a real barrier to the attainment of the Millennium Goals.

The continued existence of conflicts in the Middle East provides a source of worry. After decades, it is time that a workable solution be found to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

The current Iraqi crisis is also troubling to a world body searching for solutions to world conflicts. Liberia calls for a unified global approach to the Iraqi question and urges the United Nations to play an active role in the resolution of that crisis.

In Africa, news from the Darfur region in Sudan is frightening. We support the position of the African Union on the Darfur problem and ask for a speedy resolution of the crisis so as to bring relief to the region.

The recent massacre of nearly 200 Tutsi in Burundi sends a grim reminder of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Urgent action should be taken to contain the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Making peace is difficult because the resolution of conflicts sometimes engenders new contradictions that must be addressed. In post-conflict situations like ours, where national capacities have been decimated, the continued goodwill of the international community to assist in reconstruction is paramount. We thus pray for the continued engagement of the United Nations in global crises.

Liberia has gone through 15 years of violent conflicts. In Accra, Ghana, in 2003, Liberians reasoned together to reject war and build a better society. Liberia is now breaking through from being a failed State to being a democratic and vibrant society. There is now a growing sense of hope and optimism among our people. We cannot fail now, for we have seen the cost of war as compared to the price of peace. Liberians have finally resolved to choose the path of peace and stay on it.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Carlos Mesa Gisbert, President of the Republic of Bolivia

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bolivia.

Mr. Carlos Mesa Gisbert, President of the Republic of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (spoke in French): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Carlos Mesa Gisbert, President of the Republic of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Mesa Gisbert (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Bolivia, I wish to express a concern that is global: the issue of terrorism. A world that is haunted by terrorism is an insecure world, one whose prospects are threatened. Bolivia believes that the fight against terrorism is one of the most important tasks we need to undertake together. The incident in Beslan in the Russian Federation demonstrates how far it is possible to go in brutal actions that are entirely divorced from any sense of humanity.

The fight against terrorism must also be linked to the struggle against other scourges of concern to us all. In that context, Bolivia affirms its most resolute commitment to the fight against drug trafficking, which in our country is being waged through the eradication of excess coca, undertaken with respect for the nation's tradition of consumption. That joint task could not be fulfilled without the presence and support of the international community and in the context of shared responsibility. Shared responsibility requires clear action to be taken on both sides of the chain of production to eliminate the scourge of drug trafficking. Shared responsibility requires the social and the economic issues to be considered when addressing the problem.

Bolivia has elaborated the idea of alternative development, which we would wish to see converted into comprehensive development. In other words, the participation of the communities and villages where coca is produced in Bolivia should be part of the decision-making process and of the design of strategies to modify current practices of cultivation and to generate reasonable economic options, to open markets, and to reduce the costs of intervention to the international community in the eradication of coca, and in particular in the process of seeking viable alternative ways for the Bolivian economy.

We believe that the fight against the scourges that are currently stalemating humankind could not be waged without a multilateral response to the challenges to modern society. We firmly believe in multilateralism and strongly support the United Nations as the arena of that multilateralism. We are convinced that the time has come to produce a series of comprehensive reforms in the Organization as a whole. That would require, inter alia, an expansion of the Security Council at the onset of a new historic era. As the challenges have changed, so too must the responses.

In that context, we are convinced that another aspect to be thoroughly reviewed is the paradigm of global development, which is unsustainable over time and will not allow for long-term responses, but which will instead generate complex problems that cannot be resolved. A change in the development paradigm requires openness of mind and a heterodox capacity to respond to the basic parameters in which the world economy functions today, without demagogic responses or utopian solutions. On the contrary, we need to ponder such issues as hunger, poverty and exclusion, which afflict millions of human beings on our planet.

This is a good opportunity to recall that, over the past year, Bolivia has experienced a particularly difficult situation. In October 2003, a social, political and economic crisis pushed our nation to the brink of confrontation and violence, with unforeseeable consequences. The crisis threatened all of our institutions, and in particular our democratic system. The Bolivian response to that crisis was issued peacefully, in respect for democracy, through a mechanism of constitutional succession that allowed me, as Vice-President, to take office as President and to assume the enormous challenges to the country in order to restore order, peace and the prospects and hopes of our society.

Why did this crisis occur in Bolivia? It happened because of an accumulation of historic arrears that, at some point, had to be paid for by our society. Those arrears included exclusion, discrimination, a vision of Bolivian society rife with racism, and truly dreadful poverty. The efforts undertaken by the country on the basis of a liberal economic model and of a structural adjustment model had their highs and lows. Positive results allowed for macroeconomic stability, but genuinely inadequate results in the social sphere were the outcome primarily of exhaustion and the need for different responses. All of those historical arrears fell due in October, leading to a popular upheaval that ended in social turmoil, calling not only for a short-term response — ours, I believe, was effective in that democracy and peace were preserved — but also and above all for a forward-looking solution.

What are the major challenges facing Bolivia today in its geographical, historical and geopolitical contexts? It must first resolve its own conflict between society and State and the challenges of its own economic growth. One of the country's key issues was the definition of an energy policy once we learned that our nation has one of the largest reserves of natural gas in South America.

We chose a path that was difficult, yet attractive, and that marked our desire for democratic participation and participative democracy — please forgive the wordplay — within our society. We opted for a binding referendum in which the people of Bolivia were able to decide what they wished to do with their most important energy resources. The referendum highlighted our will to participate and to define our own destiny. It was successfully held on 18 July. It took place in a framework of peace, of democratic participation and of clear and convincing responses that allowed our Government to move forward with a hydrocarbons and natural gas policy that regulates export, industrialization and relations with investors and investment companies that are appropriate and useful to our nation.

In this forum, I wish to affirm our belief in a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship between private investors in Bolivia and the representatives of the State. Perhaps one of the most important lessons of recent years is that we must neither revert to the old system of State capitalism of the 1950s and 1960s, nor pursue the rigid orthodoxy of the liberal vision.

The answer for today is a practical combination within the false distinction between the market and the State. That distinction must be abolished and the combination made viable without exclusions and without jeopardizing the fundamental concept, in which we believe, that legal security is guaranteed by the rule of law. That is the path on which we have embarked as we work to adopt new hydrocarbons legislation.

Perhaps the most important thing for Bolivia in the coming months, however, is to reach a new social covenant. While the relationship between society and the State has been severely damaged and threatened by collapse, it is clear that the concept of democratic participation has to be reflected in that covenant through a constituent assembly, freely elected to define the outline of the country that we wish to build in the immediate future.

Given that my Government has no political party or organized presence in that context, we shall convene a constituent assembly that is truly pluralistic and in which the elements of our Magna Carta will be provided by various social sectors yet respond to a single basic concept: an end to exclusion and discrimination; the option — in a country where the majority is of indigenous Quechua, Aymara or Guaraní origin — for the majority to express itself; and the definition, in a democratic context and in the framework of distinct regions and distinct visions, of the profile of a viable nation.

I also wish to note that we achieved something very important after the crisis: the restoration of peace through transparent, honest and austere action that Bolivia urgently needed. This does not mean that the task is done. The struggle against corruption will always be a challenge in our country, as it is elsewhere in the world, but I believe that we have demonstrated a clear commitment that has given us credibility and legitimacy in our society.

Transparency, honesty and austerity are vital elements in a poor nation that must administer appropriately and efficiently the meagre resources at its disposal. In that context, I wish here at the United Nations to thank the international community, which was consistent and unified in its support for Bolivia during the crisis and in the following months, helping us to implement a consistent macroeconomic policy to resolve such serious issues as its heavy fiscal deficit.

Given its geographical location at the centre of our continent, Bolivia should be a pivotal country in the fast-paced process of integration. That process has two major protagonists: the Andean Community, of which we are a member, and the Southern Common Market, of which we are an associate member. At first, we were a "hinge" country, but we are now in the process of integration that will gradually encompass a large bloc of South American nations, which we welcome and towards which we are striving.

In that context of coordination and integration, Bolivia holds a key play in any process of infrastructure development. In energy, Bolivia is a country that can serve as South America's energy distribution hub. In telecommunications — fibre optics in particular — and, of course, in highway infrastructure, we are vital and must be an actor that facilitates rather than obstructs.

I wish to share a thought here with such multilateral entities as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other organizations that are cooperating with Bolivia and other developing countries.

Because of its revenues and high level of debt, Bolivia has been considered to be a heavily indebted poor country. In theory, that has given it a series of advantages in debt servicing and, above all, in the channelling of that servicing not towards repayment, but towards social services. Paradoxically, however, this has limited the country's capacity to obtain non-concessional loans that would allow us to implement infrastructure projects that are of interest not only to Bolivia, but to all countries of the region.

We believe that we must begin to look differently at the way international organizations interpret those loans in order to make them more flexible and to avoid the paradox whereby an advantage becomes a burden that makes development impossible. We hope that this new approach will be grasped by the international community, and in particular by the multilateral organizations.

Lastly, I wish to broach a subject that we will always stress in our statements before the world community. Bolivia's landlocked status is a factor that has curbed our development. Bolivia was born as an independent country with a coastline on the Pacific Ocean. Today, we demand free, useful and sovereign access to that Ocean. Our demand has moral, historical and legal bases and is linked to the high economic cost that has made development difficult throughout our history. We make this demand, and I want to emphasize this, on the basis of a logic of construction — a logic of integration.

Chile and Bolivia are countries that complement each other. We are countries that have a destiny of shared development and integration. To fail to find a solution to the Bolivian issue is to negate the possibility of development and integration and prevent it from becoming a reality.

Bolivia is prepared to undertake an open dialogue in order to find an appropriate and definitive solution to the problem. That is all the more true today because South American integration is so close at hand, and because Bolivia's maritime problem has become an obstacle on the path to that integration.

We are expressing a rational, constructive desire — a will for integration. Our demand is unchanging and has profound relevance in the context of everything I said earlier.

I should like to conclude by stating here, before the nations of the world, that our country is one of peace that believes in disarmament. It believes also that we need to reflect on and change many of the paradigms which in the course of time have crystallized certain positions and have limited the open-mindedness that we need today, more than ever, in the twenty-first century, in order to face the challenges of the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Mesa Gisbert, President of the Republic of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Note: I am honoured to address the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session on behalf of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Allow me to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election, and to wish you well in your endeavours throughout this session.

This year has seen important landmarks for the Marshall Islands at the domestic level. On 1 May we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of our Constitution. The same day also marked the entry into force of our amended Compact of Free Association with the United States. The renewal of that agreement reaffirms the special relationship between our two countries.

At the regional level, we continue to place great importance on our membership in the Pacific Islands Forum. Over the past year, the Forum has conducted a comprehensive review of existing regional mechanisms. Last month Pacific leaders met in Samoa, where they endorsed the terms of reference of a new Pacific Plan, which will develop a strategy for broader regional cooperation based on the key goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

At the international level, the Marshall Islands reaffirms its solidarity with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which continues to act as a powerful voice for small island developing States.

It has long been recognized that small island developing States suffer from unique vulnerabilities and disadvantages. In January 2005, the international community will meet in Mauritius to conduct the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Over the past year, members of AOSIS have been engaged in a detailed process of preparation for the international meeting. At an interregional meeting in January, small island developing States adopted the AOSIS Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, which addresses critical issues including climate change and sea-level rise, renewable energy, trade access and others.

It is vital that we maintain the momentum in the lead-up to Mauritius in order to ensure a successful outcome for small island developing States. I encourage the international community to become engaged in the ongoing preparatory process and to participate in the international meeting at the highest level. It is our fervent hope that the meeting will produce practical outcomes that will assist small island developing States in implementing the Programme of Action to benefit people at the local level.

In this increasingly globalized world, the Marshall Islands faces challenges shared by many other small island States. Our environment is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural disasters; our small population faces the challenge of managing high levels of major diseases such as diabetes, and the risk of the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; and our limited resource base and remoteness restrict our ability to integrate into the global economy.

With these challenges in mind, the Marshall Islands is particularly concerned about the following issues.

First, regarding sustainable development, the Marshall Islands has developed a national sustainable development strategy, and we are in the process of establishing a task force to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals are fully integrated into our national strategy. In striving to achieve internationally agreed development goals, we are severely constrained by our lack of human and technical resources. Thus we continue to seek to form partnerships that will assist us through capacity-building and technology transfer.

We were pleased that the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development focused on water, sanitation and human settlements. We in the Pacific region are working hard to improve access to fresh water and to develop environmentally responsible waste-management systems. We seek the support of the international community to assist us in the implementation of regional projects such as the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management. We look forward to the thirteenth session of the Commission's providing further policy guidance in these areas.

An ongoing issue of the utmost concern for the people of the Marshall Islands is that of nuclear-weapon testing. Between 1946 and 1958, the United States conducted a series of nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands, which included the detonation of 23 atomic and hydrogen bombs. On 1 March this year we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Bravo test at Bikini atoll. The Bravo blast was 1,000 times more powerful than Hiroshima, and its fallout spread radioactive debris across the neighbouring islands.

Today, many of our people continue to suffer from the long-term health effects, while others remain displaced from their homes because of ongoing contamination. We urge the United States Government to fully address the issue of adequate compensation for populations affected by the nuclear testing programme and to fulfil its responsibilities regarding the safe resettlement of displaced populations.

On broader issues of disarmament and non-proliferation, we urge the international community to retain a focus on disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States, as well as on non-proliferation measures. We look forward to next year's Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and we hope that the Conference will produce substantial progress on the 13 steps towards complete nuclear disarmament.

I wish to reiterate our critical concern regarding climate change. Along with other low-lying island nations, we are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. We are already experiencing these dramatic effects: sea levels are rising, weather patterns are changing and coral reef systems are being harmed. Urgent action is needed at the global level to halt and ultimately reverse the devastating impact of climate change. Without such global action, our national efforts at sustainable development will ultimately be rendered meaningless.

While we are committed to playing our part, strong leadership is required by the major industrialized countries. We renew our support for the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, and we call upon all States that have not yet done so — in particular the major emitters — to ratify the Protocol without further delay. We also call upon the international community to assist small island developing States in developing and implementing comprehensive adaptation strategies.

As a nation whose livelihood depends on the resources of the sea, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the state of the world's oceans and fish stocks. At the regional level, we cooperate closely with other members of the Pacific Islands Forum to ensure that the oceans and marine resources in our region are managed in a responsible and sustainable manner. The Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy, adopted in 2002, will be implemented throughout the region under a recently developed framework for integrated strategic action. Another notable achievement in the region is the entry into force of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

While such developments are encouraging, we reiterate our concerns regarding the prevalence of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Like many other small island developing States, we rely on fisheries resources as a primary means of survival, yet we lack the capacity to adequately monitor our exclusive economic zone. Regional and international cooperation must focus on addressing the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and assisting small island developing States by building capacity for monitoring and surveillance.

I have briefly mentioned a few of the major priorities for the Marshall Islands. There are, of course, many other important issues to be addressed during the upcoming session.

International terrorism is obviously one of the biggest challenges facing the global community today. The reality is that no State or region is immune. All States must take action at the national level and must cooperate at the regional and international levels to ensure that we combat terrorist threats with comprehensive and unified action. Within the Pacific region, we continue to cooperate closely to ensure that effective regional action is taken to combat threats to peace and security. At the national level, we are in the process of implementing the 12 core anti-terrorism conventions and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and we have taken many steps to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Marshall Islands, as a State party to the Rome Statute, welcomes the ongoing progress of the International Criminal Court. We are pleased that the Court is now fully operational and has begun its first investigations. We are confident that the Court will play a valuable role in the administration of justice at the international level, and we urge those States that have not yet done so to become parties.

Another issue requiring action by this body is the continued exclusion of Taiwan from the United Nations. Taiwan is a peace-loving, sovereign State, and only its democratically elected Government can be the legitimate representative of the interests of the people of Taiwan within the United Nations. The Marshall Islands reiterates its full support for the ongoing quest of the people of Taiwan to be granted membership in this global body and in various other international organizations.

Finally, the Marshall Islands reiterates its support for the expansion of the Security Council in both categories of membership. We support the allocation of a new permanent seat to Japan, and we believe that the representation on the Council of developing countries must be increased. Such expansion is crucial if the Council is to retain its legitimacy.

My delegation looks forward, Mr. President, to a productive session under your able leadership.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Arnold Rüütel, President of the Republic of Estonia

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Estonia.

Mr. Arnold Rüütel, President of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Arnold Rüütel, President of the Republic of Estonia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rüütel (*spoke in Estonian; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, allow me to congratulate you on your election to the office of the President of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I wish you every success and all the best in your very important work. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his leadership of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

The current session is very significant for Estonia, since it is the first time ever that we participate at the General Assembly as a member State of the European Union and the NATO. We are therefore more aware than ever before of our shared responsibility for the world, but also of our vulnerability to global threats.

During the last few years, we have all witnessed new threats to world peace and security. We have also seen how these threats are all connected to economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. The fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly focused on the situation in Iraq. However, securing peace and stability in the Middle East remains an ongoing concern. I hope that all of this has only deepened our conviction that the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter have not really lost their topicality but rather, are even more topical now. In today's world of new threats and changing global security, we need shared solutions more than ever before. The United Nations is the only organization established to coordinate, on a global scale, the efforts of States in safeguarding international stability and security. The United Nations has to be even more decisive and efficient in order to successfully fulfil its important responsibilities in this new situation.

The reduction of world poverty continues to be a central issue on the global development agenda; less poverty would certainly mean more international stability and security. The international community has made a commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015, halving poverty in the world by that time. That is a very optimistic promise indeed, and it assumes that all countries must perform even more purposefully and in an even more coordinated manner. High-level meetings in Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg have shown us the way; now, we must act.

At the forthcoming 2005 summit, we will review our progress in fulfilling the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration. I would like to appeal to all of us here to work so that we would be content with the conclusions in the interim report.

Together with other United Nations Member States, Estonia shares responsibility for balanced development in the world and makes its contribution towards achieving the common goals. Only recently, we were one of the recipient countries of international aid. Now that we are one of the donors, we are very much aware of how important it is that international aid be coordinated and harmonized. We began providing international aid in 1998. Time has shown that the Estonian experience in building up democratic institutions, implementing economic reforms and involving civil society in public life and decision-making can really help other countries where such processes are still in their initial stage.

Despite the work that has already been done to achieve the very challenging Millennium Development Goals, we must admit, unfortunately, that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. What is more, it is taking new forms in our changing world. In addition to economic inequality, the information era has brought about the so-called digital divide, a divide between information-rich and information-poor States and nations as well as social groups. I would like to briefly elaborate on this topic.

In spite of the rapid development in information technology over the last ten years, only a small group of privileged countries and social groups have benefited from the so-called digital revolution. For example, let us consider access to the Internet. Many of us cannot really imagine life without the Internet, but four-fifths of the world population have never had any contact with the Internet. More than a half of Internet users live in Europe or in North America, which together represent only 17 per cent of the world's population. In Africa, only 1.4 per cent of the population uses the Internet.

The digital divide exists not only between countries but also within countries, between different social groups. The causes of such a divide can be age, gender, language, education or income. The digital divide is a reflection of technological, social and economic backwardness, perhaps due to a lack of infrastructure or to that infrastructure being very expensive. At the same time, the digital divide is not only an expression of existing socio-economic inequality, but also amplifies it and even causes it. Today, the social and economic value of access to information is much higher than it was 20 years ago. Unequal access to know-how, information networks and opportunities to contribute to these networks, will, in the longer term, lead to a further marginalization of poor countries and poor social groups. Paradoxically, the very same Internet is behind this marginalization, although it is supposed to be the cheapest and most efficient way to exchange information and knowledge in the world.

Since information technology has a strong impact on economic growth and competitiveness, there is no doubt that it is a new factor in development policy. That is why in recent years, more and more attention has focused on the causes and consequences of the digital divide. For example, the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2001 concentrated on those problems and was the centre of attention at the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva.

I am very pleased that Estonia has, in a relatively short period of time, achieved a remarkable level in several areas of information technology. We have managed to create a favourable environment for development in this field and have ensured that the necessary infrastructure has been created through close cooperation between the public sector and the private sector, businesses and non-governmental organizations. As a result of this, Estonian citizens of limited means now have access to several information society services. According to "The Economist", as of 2004, Estonia ranks 26th in the world in e-readiness and holds a leading position among Central and Eastern European countries. More than half the Estonian population regularly uses the Internet; 38 per cent own computers; 80 per cent own mobile phones; 62 per cent use Internet banking; and 59 per cent fill out their tax returns electronically. Estonians can communicate with both the central Government and local governments over the Internet and are able to use legally binding digital signatures. All those indicators are in line with European Union averages even though Estonia's gross domestic product remains considerably lower than the European average.

I believe that, as a former country in transition, Estonia has experiences which could be very useful for developing countries with respect to the promotion of information and communication technologies. Estonia is in a position to provide development assistance, first and foremost in the form of know-how. We have already taken steps in that direction: in the summer of 2002 the Government of Estonia, the United Nations Development Programme and the Information Programme of the Open Society Institute jointly set up the Estonian e-Governance Academy. The purpose of that unique Academy is to improve the public-private cooperation in the information and communication technologies. The initial beneficiaries of the project are Central and Eastern European countries, countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Asian countries, but we already have future plans for African countries as well. The e-Governance Academy has already held training courses for officials from Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Albania, Kazakhstan and other countries.

The year 2004 is the final year of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. I am an Estonian, and as an Estonian I have a specific reason to talk about indigenous peoples: we are a nation that knows how important it is to preserve and develop our culture and language. Therefore, I am very happy that recent decades have seen increased momentum in the activities of the United Nations and its agencies to protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

But the approaching end of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People must not mean diminished attention to the situation of indigenous peoples. The rights of indigenous peoples must be codified in international law without further delay. Estonia firmly supports the speedy formulation and adoption of a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Regardless of the progress that has been made locally, many of the world's peoples remain uncertain about the preservation of their cultures and languages. Restrictions on the rights of indigenous peoples are one of the reasons behind the emergence of hot spots and crises.

Mr. Dauth (Australia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Scientists enter endangered species into a Red Book in order to help save them from extinction. But we do not yet have a Red Book of peoples. When a species of wildlife disappears, nature becomes poorer and the ecological balance can be damaged. By the same token, the extinction of a people means that the whole world becomes intellectually and culturally poorer.

Anthropologists have used the concept of the "fourth world" to refer to the ever increasing marginalization of indigenous peoples and the deterioration of their living conditions. The living conditions of Finno-Ugric peoples in their historic homelands provide a worrying example. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has expressed its concerns in that respect. In August this year, the fourth World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples took place in Estonia under the motto "Youth is our future." The final document of the Congress expressed concern about the ongoing loss of national identity by Finno-Ugric peoples and called on the international community to devote greater attention to the protection of human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities.

I would like finally to touch upon the future of the United Nations. The United Nations needs to be strengthened and improved: it needs to be reorganized so that it can better respond to new challenges. Reorganization and increased efficiency would make the Organization more reliable and provide it with greater authority. Here, all Member States share a common goal: to ensure the steady development of the United Nations and to effect reforms that would enhance its effectiveness as a multilateral organization. Estonia firmly supports that process.

I believe that greater attention should be devoted to the prevention of crises and conflicts. We await the publication on 1 December of the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which could provide essential guidelines for making the United Nations function more efficiently in the changed global framework.

Thanks to the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the President of the fifty-eighth session, Julian Hunte, and thanks to the cooperation of Member States, discussions on revitalization of the work of the General Assembly have yielded concrete and desirable results, reflected in resolution 58/316, adopted on 1 July. That resolution is an essential landmark in the process of changing and modernizing the General Assembly to keep pace with developments in world events. At the fifty-ninth session, under the presidency of Mr. Jean Ping, we must continue and intensify our efforts in that direction.

Finally, it is also high time that we moved forward with reform of the Security Council, which would enable the United Nations to participate more effectively in resolving world problems and crises.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Estonia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Arnold Rüütel, President of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Martin Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Torrijos (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by warmly congratulating Mr. Jean Ping, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I wish also to extend my country's thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the powerful and inspiring words he spoke yesterday (see A/59/PV.3).

Thousands of my compatriots are today suffering under the blows of nature. Floods of a kind never before seen have brought grief to many families. The entire country has turned to the victims in a truly moving display of solidarity. With my heart in Panama with the victims and their families, I have come to the United Nations, because the tragedy unfolding in my country highlights more than ever the need to tackle the problem of poverty urgently.

The United Nations was conceived as a way of preventing war and restoring peace. Today, all the countries of the world have to be able to feel that they can come to the United Nations to solve their problems and not just to discuss them. If that is to happen, the United Nations must reform.

For some years, from this rostrum, heads of State and Government have been urging the need for reform, and the Secretary-General has welcomed that initiative. I want to join my voice to theirs so that once and for all we actually carry out the reform. We cannot afford to wait any longer or the people of the world will lose faith in the United Nations.

We do not need an organization with a glorious past. We need an organization with a future, one that can tackle the world's most serious problems. For that reason it is necessary that the principal organs be more representative.

There are political struggles and armed conflicts on every continent. There is no region of the world where peace and harmony reign. Some are regional conflicts, some are internal ones, but they are no less bloody for that. And yet, there is one struggle that is global in dimension and that requires global solutions. I am speaking of the struggle against hunger and poverty. That was the subject of a 20 September meeting of more than 60 world leaders, who were resolved to tackle it with all the tools available to them. I need not dwell on the tragic numbers, but I do endorse what has been said by the moving force of that meeting, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil: "peace can never grow out of poverty and hunger".

In Latin America the threat to democracy posed by military coups has been significantly reduced. It is no longer army divisions that threaten democracy; it is the legions of the poor and the unprotected who can destroy democratic institutions if their basic needs are not met.

But then we face a contradiction: the more poverty there is in a given country, the less likelihood there is of being able to defeat it. Countries are crushed by public debt. Millions of people are being born today already owing more than they will earn in their entire lifetime. Often those debts are the result of past deficits, which, owing to excessive bureaucracy, bad projects or corruption, produced no tangible benefits for the people. The fiscal problems facing most of the countries in our region make the situation even worse, as Governments lack the resources they need to try to meet the minimum needs of their people.

This analysis is not a new one. The "lost decade" of the 1980s was the result of exactly the same problems, although there was also an international economic crisis and an absence of democratic legitimacy in most of the continent at that time. There are, however, undeniable differences between that period and the present. On the one hand, over the past few years unprecedented wealth has been generated, while at the same time the number of poor has grown. On the other hand, although more countries are democratic today, there is also a greater amount of debate on how to effectively address society's immediate problems.

Democracy, as a system of government, ended up being conflated with the limitations of individuals, while in truth the problem was that Governments were unable to produce effective responses. The problem is thus not democracy; the problem lies with Governments.

Direct help to Governments, in the form of loans or grants, has not been enough or sufficiently effective to solve the problems of poverty or the lack of growth that the aid was supposed to correct. Those of us who have the responsibility of governing and trying to provide answers cannot forget that, for many, patience has yielded to despair. The immediacy of their needs demands immediate solutions, which are not always to hand. That means that we have to speak out clearly about the problems, that we have to administer our States with transparency and that we have to fight corruption in order to win back the trust of people who are tired of so much deception and frustration.

Latin America needs a new economic agenda, one not based at just throwing money at social problems. It needs an agenda that seeks to understand the complex nature of our countries and institutions. Stopping payments, restructuring, adjustments — that is a road that we have been down before, and our region was the loser.

The new agenda requires absolute transparency in public administration and accountability. But the task of making public administration more efficient and more transparent takes time and resources. But interest on debt builds up, and the needs of a large sector of the population also increase.

Progress in reducing poverty among our peoples will require much effort and great resources from the poor countries; to a degree, creditor countries and multilateral agencies could compensate them by reducing public debt. In that regard, we propose that a relief clause be included in the lending programmes of the international financial institutions to reduce future interest on our public debt if we meet agreed goals on poverty reduction. That would be one way of compensating Governments for their efforts to alleviate poverty while also allowing them to meet their financial obligations.

In the past few years, people's concerns have shifted dramatically. Cultural heritage, natural wealth, biodiversity and animal species threatened with extinction must all be protected. It seems that sometimes financial resources are found more easily for those issues than for the millions of human beings who are dying every day of hunger, or for those who are barely surviving, unable to live a decent life, and without hope.

I would like to join in the widespread call on the international community to devise and implement bold and generous approaches to tackle poverty. It is shameful that in the technological age, when so many things have been invented that were unimaginable just 10 years ago, that we have not been able to invent a way for millions of people in the world to escape from the subhuman conditions to which poverty condemns them.

Sometimes it seems that international aid is provided only if there are desperate tragedies or acts of terrorism. Of course, when nations are victims of national disaster or terrorism such international assistance is necessary and commendable. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Panama's resolve to combat terrorism wherever it may occur. But we must not forget that many more people die because of poverty than in wars or natural disasters.

I am pleased to report that Panama has done its duty and has stood by the international community in its efficient and safe management of the Canal. We shall continue in future to manage that important artery of international trade in the same way, so that it will be, as it has been today, open to shipping from all countries of the world.

I will return to my country optimistic, because I have seen here a determination to fight poverty. I have sensed the solidarity of the international community in the face of natural disaster and I have renewed my belief that when there is the will, when there is faith and determination, the most difficult tasks can be accomplished.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Martin Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kabila (*spoke in French*): At this time, when I have the honour to take the floor before this august Assembly, above all I would like to express to you, on behalf of the Congolese people as well as on my own behalf, my warm congratulations to Mr. Jean Ping on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly as well as the election of the members of his Bureau.

I also take this occasion to congratulate and give my continued support to Mr. Julian Hunte, the President of the previous General Assembly, for the significant quality of the work he accomplished during a difficult international situation.

This debate provides me the opportunity to bring the message of my country to the world — a message of peace and national reconciliation — and to express our vision concerning the violent events taking place in the world and the most appropriate way to find lasting solutions to those events.

In that respect, looking back at world developments, we can only note and deplore the rise in international terrorism in all its forms with its long line of victims, distress and desolation. This appears to me to be the appropriate time to announce that my country's commitment to the ratification of all international legal instruments on terrorism is moving into its final phase of adoption. Our aim is to combat that scourge which — I repeat — spares no one.

Apart from terrorism, the international community is confronted with the resurgence of other disasters which are just as murderous and devastating and which require us to strengthen our collective efforts. In particular I am thinking of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other endemic diseases.

That list of forgotten diseases should not obscure the immense poverty and the natural disasters that we see throughout the world. Moreover, we must not forget the areas of tension, civil wars and other armed conflicts which increase the misery and hopelessness of humanity and which thus sorely test international peace and security.

During the intersessional period, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been characterized by a process of political transition. In the long term, we plan to organize elections which will enable the Congolese people to freely choose their leaders. In that respect, I would like to point out that that process reached its midway point on 30 June 2004. It has thus entered a decisive phase which requires from all institutions of the transition a redoubling of effort in order to meet the electoral deadlines as laid out in the global agreement.

Today we can congratulate ourselves on the following significant progress: the reunification of national territory through the setting up of a land commission under central authority; national reconciliation, symbolized by the presence in the Government of former enemies; and the beginning of the process of integration of the army and the establishment of the national police force.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done, including the complete restoration of the authority of the State throughout the country and the establishment of the necessary internal and external conditions for the holding of the aforementioned elections.

Thus, taking into account the desire for peace of all of the Congolese people, and the determination expressed many times by the transitional Government to respect the deadlines, it is important that we reinforce, in terms of quality and quantity, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), whose support of the forces of order will help us put an end to the activism of the militias which continue to sow death and desolation in the eastern part of the country. In addition, given the results obtained by the political players in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the fulfilment of their obligations under the global agreement, we launch an urgent appeal to the international community and ask it to respect its promises and commitments in bringing about the objectives of the transition.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a peace-loving country, resolutely committed to developing, maintaining and promoting excellent relations with all countries dedicated to peace and justice and particularly, with its neighbours.

Also the principle of good neighbourliness, far from being a simple slogan, is for us a living and daily reality. That is why I am happy to see the signature of the terms of reference, establishing a joint verification mechanism on the eastern border of our national territory. This will enable us to rebuild trust in relations in the region, a process which will culminate in the international conference on peace, security and development, scheduled to take place shortly.

The other major task in the Great Lakes region remains preventing a recurrence of unfortunate events, such as the massacres of the people in Bukuvu, Ituri and those recently committed in Gatumba, Burundi, during which 160 of our fellow citizens tragically lost their lives. This assassination of Congolese refugees on Burundian soil is the work of the enemies of peace and of peaceful cohabitation in our subregion. The people of Congo are waiting impatiently for the report of the inquiry being prepared under United Nations auspices on this very subject.

I solemnly express the Congolese people's faith in the United Nations, which has stood at our side at the cost of many sacrifices. We firmly believe in its ability to take even more responsibility on its shoulders, with a view to the ideas and principles contained in the Charter, particularly with regard to its process of revitalization and the adaptation of its structures so that it is able to rethink its working methods in order that we will see peace, security and peaceful cohabitation come about among peoples throughout the world.

I would like to conclude my statement by assuring the Assembly of our will to bring to a successful conclusion, with the help of the whole of the international community, the process of transition within the set deadlines so that the sons and daughters of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are able to live again in peace and dignity so long denied them and to which they legitimately have the right.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Adamkus: Allow me to express my sincere thanks to the President of the General Assembly at its previous session, Julian Hunte, whose able and skilful leadership we enjoyed during the past session. I also wish the President at the fifty-ninth session, Jean Ping, a year of highly constructive and successful work.

It is our common duty to make this fifty-ninth session a success and a fitting preparation for the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations and the first high-level review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, to be held next year. I believe these two occasions will offer an excellent framework for a serious review of how the changing global situation can be met by a renewed United Nations.

The risks and challenges of the new millennium affect us all and can be tackled only by common efforts. Threats such as terrorism recognize no borders, no differentiation by race, religion, or ethnicity. The horror, devastation and fear that terrorism brings are the same whether in Casablanca, Madrid, New York, Jerusalem or Beslan. Terrorism cannot be justified. And there can be no excuses and no leniency in confronting it. The fight against terrorism must remain one of the priority tasks of individual Member States and of the United Nations.

Even as we speak, humanitarian crises, poverty, famine and disease continue to plague large parts of the world. Across the globe, almost a billion people survive on less than a dollar a day. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, around 300 million people live in abject poverty.

In Iraq, the hope for universal and free elections is marred by almost daily explosions, and security remains too precarious for the United Nations to resume its pivotal role. The Middle East conflict continues taking its desperate death toll. And the word genocide is once again on our lips owing to the Darfur crisis in Sudan.

Therefore, we need to go the extra mile, to make extra efforts to empower the United Nations to deal successfully with these and other threats and challenges, because the United Nations, despite all the criticism, remains the only Organization capable of embodying the principles of a truly global and effective multilateralism. The United Nations can offer the global reach and legitimacy necessary to enable the international community to act.

As the nature of threats before us is changing and new responses are needed, it is high time to agree on future policies and principles. Today we need to build a shared understanding of the nature of modern threats to international peace and security. Much depends on the ability of the United Nations — that is, on us — to reach a new consensus on collective security. Our strength lies in our resolve to deal collectively with major challenges to peace, security and sustainable development.

Today, more than ever before, the United Nations has to play the leading role in building societies that follow the path of good governance, respect human rights and the rule of law. We must be able to intervene and to prevent situations of massive human rights violations.

We must also be firm in our struggle against all attempts to encroach upon human dignity, against all forms and manifestations of intolerance, anti-Semitism, racism or Islamophobia. The international community is vulnerable to the dangers posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international organized crime, environmental degradation and the spread of highly dangerous diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Our common efforts against these and other threats must be universal, consistent, systematic and unwavering.

No less universal and consistent must be our efforts to reduce poverty and hunger, to diminish disparities between and within nations, to improve living conditions for women and children and to offer a hope of a dignified life to ever-larger segments of the world's population, as pledged in the Millennium Declaration.

We need to press ahead with the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. We need to reinforce our political will to make our global partnership more effective, by fully honouring the commitments undertaken by the Monterrey Consensus.

Without peace there is no development. Without development there is no peace. This recognized linkage of security and development should be better reflected in our global agenda. Only by confronting these issues in a coherent and coordinated manner shall we be able to build our common future.

Lithuania is ready to contribute bilaterally and multilaterally to the implementation of the Millennium Goals, and by sharing our experience of a national reform process. Our membership in the enlarged European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance enables us to play a more active role by embracing the principles of development policy and by adopting the role of a donor.

Next year we will discuss how to find consensus on the institutional and political framework for the United Nations to operate in the future. Lithuania fully embraces the need for reform of the United Nations for the sake of enhancing its effectiveness and inclusiveness. We hope that the outcome of the deliberations of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change will be able to contribute significantly to giving a renewed impetus to the reform of the United Nations. If so, the next test will be to find broad agreement on changes and follow their implementation.

I hope, too, that next year will be crucial in moving ahead with the long-debated reform of the Security Council. The issue is not whether the Security Council should be enlarged. It is how to make it effective and representative. Therefore, Lithuania fully embraces the idea of ensuring broader representation and responsibility for the Security Council.

In addition, the Economic and Social Council must be renewed and strengthened. By dedicating ourselves to Economic and Social Council reform we have a real chance to make it an effective tool in the hands of active and responsible United Nations members.

It is my hope and wish that by the end of this session we shall arrive at marking the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations with the conviction and satisfaction that we have done everything in our power to build a better Organization, one capable of responding to both old and new, hard and soft, threats and challenges in an effective and comprehensive way.

Fully aware that the United Nations was created to serve humankind, let us embrace this challenge. Let us bring to fruition the promise that the United Nations is capable of fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the peoples for whom it was created.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Pedro Miguel de Santana Lopes, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic.

Mr. Pedro Miguel de Santana Lopes, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Pedro Miguel de Santana Lopes, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Lopes (Portugal) *(spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation)*: At the outset, I would like to state that Portugal, of course, endorses the statement made here by the presidency of the European Union. Portugal wishes the United Nations to fulfil the central role it rightly deserves in the community of nations. The United Nations is an indispensable international Organization. Without this body, of which we are all a part, the world would be more unstable, less predictable and a place where the universal dream of peace and freedom would be no more than a mirage on a far-off horizon.

The United Nations was established in a distant historical context, but its ideas and basic values remain contemporary. Portugal has a habit of recalling them, on occasions such as this, because we feel that this common undertaking is based on solid foundations. "We the peoples of the United Nations" believe in the dignity and the value of the human being, in fundamental freedoms and in equality between men and women. We defend the primacy of international law and tolerance in relations between peoples.

But we also believe that one should not distinguish between large and small nations, as we all have a common interest in social advancement and in the maintenance of international peace and security. These are the objectives of this Organization that need to be preserved and strengthened. This is, in good truth, our common cause, the cause of humankind.

The month of September, in this city of New York, inevitably brings back memories of the horror of three years ago. It forces us to look at the challenges to peace that this Organization and all of us face today. The tragic events in Madrid, Beslan, Baghdad, Jakarta and other places show us that terrorism has entered the deepest and darkest of shadows.

No cause, no idea, justifies acts of pure barbarism and the spilling of innocent blood. Terrorism is an enemy of humankind. Moreover, Portugal believes that it is up to the United Nations to contribute decisively to the establishment of a global strategy against terrorism — a strategy that takes into account not only the obvious security-related responses, but also other elements that may have the potential to generate violence.

Let us be unyielding in the fight against terrorism, but let us also engage ourselves in doing it collectively. Let us take into account the laws and the values in whose name we are fighting, and should be fighting, this evil.

Hunger and poverty generate despair and may cause people to choose the path of violence. I would therefore like to express my appreciation for the Summit of World Leaders for Action against Hunger and Poverty, promoted by President Lula da Silva, which I had the honour to attend. We believe that that meeting was a fundamental step towards alleviating cases of extreme poverty, which are unsustainable in moral and political terms.

If we act now, the world can change for the better; if we do not, its balance could become increasingly difficult to manage. Portugal wants to be at the forefront of the future. That is why we believe that the sustainability of development and the defence of natural resources are paradigms of a new era. We believe that the economic development of the twenty-first century will be sustainable only if it truly respects the balance of the planet and if the Kyoto provisions are truly implemented.

Does it make sense that an Organization like the United Nations continues to work in the twenty-first century as it did 60 years ago? The United Nations was born at a time when there were no televisions, no computers, no cellular phones. Communications, technologies and means of transportation have all changed; DNA and the human genome have now been discovered; we surf the Internet on a global scale. And yet the Organization that brings together the peoples of the world has the same structure that it had more than half a century ago.

The pace of change is breathtaking. The United Nations finds itself at a crossroads: while its relevance is not challenged, we may question its effectiveness. But that is an issue that should be placed primarily before Member States. After all, the United Nations is an expression of our collective will. The Organization cannot be seen as a distant reflection on which we project our individual expectations, which often exceed the limits of the mandates and the means that we make available to it.

In that regard, we support the work of the High-Level Panel established last year by the Secretary-General to examine current challenges to peace and security. The strategies for strengthening the Organization to be recommended by the Panel aim at preserving what is best in the United Nations and at ensuring that it is equipped with the means necessary to promote real development, prevent conflicts and protect human rights.

Portugal unequivocally supports reform of the Security Council. We support its enlargement so that it will better reflect the world of today, through a rebalancing of its representativity. We have already stated before this forum — and we reaffirm today — our support for an increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members. Portugal's support for Brazil, Germany and Japan has been known to the General Assembly since 1993. We have already expressed our support for India's application for candidacy, and, on behalf of the Government of Portugal, I take the opportunity to express our commitment to seeing the African continent represented by a permanent seat on the Security Council.

But we also want to improve the relationship between the Council and other organs and agencies of the United Nations, as well as promoting greater transparency in its decisions. The democracy that the Organization defends is not compatible with obsolete working methods that often have a negative impact on the image and the credibility of the United Nations and lead to its paralysis.

Preventing conflicts is more important than solving them. We should be aware that the usefulness of the United Nations will ultimately be judged by its capacity for conflict prevention. The proliferation of crisis situations has led to the current deployment of approximately 60,000 Blue Helmets in peacekeeping operations, and that number continues to increase.

Portugal has been with the United Nations in many of its peacekeeping operations around the world. Here, I would like to pay tribute to my compatriots and to all others who have served on peacekeeping missions, particularly those who have given their lives for our common ideals.

It is our hope that the Organization can better develop its work in the field of conflict prevention. However, we still lack an efficient instrument for the development of that policy. Therefore, at the last session of the General Assembly, Portugal proposed the creation of a commission to promote peace and development, under the authority of and in collaboration with the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Its objectives would be to regularly monitor countries in crisis or at risk and to ensure the cooperation6 of regional and international institutions.

We believe that our proposal remains relevant, and we thank all those who have already improved it through suggestions and comments. This is an idea on which we have worked in particular with our partners in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which I would like to warmly acknowledge on this occasion.

Indeed, the Portuguese language is the unifying factor among hundreds of millions of people on five continents. So that it can have strength as a vehicle of communication and culture in the twenty-first century, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries needs its members to make a clear commitment to the connection between the past, the present and the future. The fact that Portugal is the cradle of the Portuguese language does not lead us to claim it for ourselves alone with any special rights. The communities that one joins as a result of specific interests, however legitimate, can never erase one's own community — one's family, spirit, language, culture and identity. "Know thyself" was already inscribed at the foot of the Temple of Delphi.

Nowhere are we confronted with such a huge predicament regarding the ability of the United Nations to act as in Iraq. Iraq needs the support of the international community. The Iraqi people, ravaged by decades of dictatorship and war, deserve such support. And we should give the United Nations the necessary means to fulfil in its entirety the mandate provided by the Security Council. But we must also understand clearly that the international presence in Iraq — approved by the Security Council and by the Iraqi Interim Government — is by its own nature provisional.

It is time for the international community to unite in its efforts to ensure that the Iraqi people again find the path towards peace and development. We cannot change the past, but we must assume that the future can still be influenced in a positive way. Thus, we must quickly restore unity if our Organization is not to suffer permanent collateral damage as a result of the Iraqi crisis.

For democracy to succeed in Iraq, and for that country to maintain its unity, it is essential that its people have a say, through elections, regarding the way they wish to be governed. It is also important that the agreed political timetable be honoured, or we may seriously compromise the rightful expectations of the Iraqi people and Government. We cannot allow those who generate instability through unthinkable acts of terrorism to have the power to veto the establishment of a democratic regime in Iraq. Elections are the only way to enable the Iraqi people to meet the destiny of democracy and freedom to which they are entitled.

Peace, freedom and democracy are also at stake in other parts of the world we inhabit. We cannot look away from the tragedy unfolding in Darfur. Our collective security also requires the effective international control of the production of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons and the means to deploy them.

For the maintenance of international security, it is also essential that the Organization continues to push for the resumption of the Middle East peace process. The existing status quo is unacceptable. Israel and Palestine need to learn to coexist in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders and without artificial partitions.

We cannot replace the dichotomy between liberalism and collectivism with another between liberty and peace on the one hand and terror and dictatorship on the other. The world has already entered a new era. The peoples of the whole world, as referred to in the Charter of the United Nations, demand a new contract between the governed and those who govern.

The three classic powers of Montesquieu are no longer the only ones in the government of the peoples. Those who believe so are lost in time. There is nothing worse than erring in our perception of reality. There are powers that are not as they were and others that Montesquieu, Locke and the drafters of liberal revolutions could not know of, because they did not exist or because, over time, they have changed configuration. One need only think of the power of the media over people's lives today.

Our peoples want to feel strength in the present and faith in the future. For that reason, I shall end my address the way I began: stressing the indispensability and the centrality of the United Nations in the daily lives of free and sovereign nations. We belong to an Organization that has restored hope to many peoples and human beings by bringing the light of freedom to those who lived in oppression. Timor-Leste is an excellent example of the ability of the United Nations to do good.

But one should also stress the attention the United Nations has given to the vulnerable, children and the disabled and to the promotion of gender equality. For this Organization, humankind is not an abstract entity. The dialogue between cultures, civilizations and religions, which Portugal upholds, is an integral part of the daily work of the United Nations.

We are part of an Organization dedicated to making peace and preventing war. We are party to a collective project in the service of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have the strength of our convictions. And, as Pope John Paul II has stated, we know that peace is not weakness, but strength.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Pedro Miguel de Santana Lopes, Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Marc Forné Molné, Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra.

Mr. Marc Forné Molné, Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Marc Forné Molné, Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Forné Molné (Andorra) (*spoke in Catalan; English text provided by the delegation*): A decade ago I was elected the Head of Government of my country. It was 1994, a time of hope for the world and for the Organization of the United Nations. The collapse of the communist system and the iron curtain and the appearance of new democracies in the world, combined with a positive economic outlook enabled us to imagine a better future for humankind in the twenty-first century.

Ten years later, we are living with considerable concern in a world that is becoming more and more violent, in which terrorist attacks are met with a military response and those military responses seem to generate new terrorist attacks. It would seem that we are caught up in a terrible settling of scores and in a spiral of hate, fanaticism and senseless bloodshed. Every day, the media shows images of innocent people and soldiers losing their lives in those conflicts. The stakes continue to rise, yet the cause of world peace seems increasingly vulnerable. The almost instantaneous arrival in every home of images of the most dramatic events taking place everywhere is even becoming banal.

The privilege of being able to come so many times to the Assembly on behalf of my country has produced in me states of mind that have gone from initial curiosity and the wish to know and learn to a much more sceptical phase, by way of periods in which large question marks were placed on the role we are all playing in this game.

We want to be positive and optimistic and not to betray the heritage of peace, harmony and open welcome that are the essence of the life of the Andorrans, both women and men. But it must be admitted that it is becoming more and more difficult to think in that way and to believe that the principles that inspired, for example, the founding of the United States of America, can still prevail.

That is because the notion of pre-emptive war has now shaken us all. The principle of attacking before one is attacked is no new invention. But it had seemed to be a tribal memory or a type of behaviour belonging to other, none too remote times in the history of Europe itself.

The big questions are: what justifies a pre-emptive attack? Which country or countries pose a sufficient threat to allow taking such a risk? Why attack one country and not another, perhaps equally dangerous one? Are the sufferings of some people more meaningful than the sufferings of others, and consequently more deserving of action? Should the conventions of international law be cast aside by

Members of the United Nations, as they are by lawless terrorists?

What I would like to do today is reflect on the things we can learn from the past that can guide us towards a more promising and safer future.

For countries with a deep respect and admiration for the history of freedom of the United States — and Andorra counts itself among those countries — it is a source of consternation to note that the doctrine of pre-emptive attack has generated a level of distrust among Governments and peoples. After the worldwide outpouring of sympathy following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, that changed perception is profoundly troubling.

Neither can anyone claim that sympathy is enough. Worldwide sympathy was the reaction to the attacks on New York and Washington. We, the people of Andorra, were very directly affected by the attacks in Madrid six months ago. Very recently, Russia has been added to the list of disasters. But sympathy alone cannot break the cycle of fear and violence.

We need to address the causes of terrorism and comprehend the forces that give it power in order to respond together in compliance with the rule of law. Tomorrow, my country will deposit instruments of ratification for four conventions against terrorism, and the rest are scheduled to be ratified in the coming year.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We cannot allow terrorism to unbind the rule of law, since that would mean undoing the tissue of civilized behaviour, which serves as a safety net in modern culture. Instead of isolating one nation from another, instead of moralizing and self-serving political posturing, instead of giving in to fear, we must recognize that our common vulnerability goes hand in hand with a humanity that we also share.

Helping every member of the international community to realize that what happens to others can also happen to us creates a basis for tolerance and understanding. How much stronger we, all the countries represented at the United Nations, could become in the fight against terrorism if we truly acted together. A Security Council strengthened by a common will to root out terrorism could do much more than individual actions supported by a few Governments.

We must give back to the United Nations its sense of determination and help it to help us all in the crucially important fight against terrorism. I call in particular on the States that are permanent members of the Security Council to think long and hard about what they can achieve together, with the support of all other United Nations Member States, to preserve international order and models of civilized behaviour, which this Organization represents and which it has taken humankind so many millenniums of suffering and progress to achieve.

In this context, Andorra would support an increase — up to 24 — in the number of members of the Security Council so as to guarantee a more accurate representation of the reality of today's world in that important decision-making body.

I believe that the energy that feeds the cycle of violence is the result of the abstractions behind which we hide — abstractions of nation, religion or race. We hide our vulnerability behind a kind of rigid certainty or moral righteousness. Ignorance and the unwillingness to recognize differences give rise to xenophobia and racism.

There is not much use in wondering now if the results would have been different, and the dangers facing us today less severe, if different policies had been applied after the criminal and unforgivable attacks of 11 September 2001; if the peace process in Israel and Palestine had been more successful; or if we in the United Nations had been able to play a different role. Granted, our response, as the United Nations, to other international crises has been imperfect, and we are constantly striving to rectify the way in which we approach such issues. But the results have been invaluable. Our efforts averted worse bloodbaths, greater harm to the oppressed and ever more extreme trauma and despair.

What good is this Organization if we lack the wisdom and moral strength to attempt to reconcile our fellow nations? How could we continue to hope for peace and justice in the world if the United Nations ceased to press forward with its mission?

Andorra has never been a wealthy country, though its inhabitants have always been free. In this respect, we have a privileged history. Other nations have endured greater privations and fratricidal wars, have lost customs and traditions and have had its citizens flee into exile.

Conscious of the moral debt which we owe to others, three years ago we proposed to increase our development assistance to 0.7 per cent of our budget for next year. Although that represents a great effort for us, as a small country, I am happy to inform the Assembly that that commitment will be honoured. I am also sure that my successor as head of Government will continue to increase Andorra's contribution to the objectives of development until we reach 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product. We will also become a member of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and help to make its worthy mission a reality.

We live in a world of limited resources and opportunities. Competition for them is increasing with the growth of globalization. The worst outcome of the inevitable future competition would be increasingly violent demands on the part of one nation or another. Yet the essential issues facing us are not restricted to just one part of the world; nor can they be defined in terms of the advantages or interests of a single nation. Preserving the environment and maintaining a strong global economy, dignified standards of living and safe and peaceful political relationships all require a concerted effort.

The task will not be easy. It will require all the courage, energy, diplomatic talent and communication skills that we can bring to bear. Our joint task has never been as important as in the coming year.

Yesterday, I listened carefully to the words of the Secretary-General, who set a very high standard for all in his opening speech. I would like sincerely to congratulate the Secretary-General for the courage of his words. I have heard many impressive speeches in this Hall over the past 10 years. The Secretary-General's statement yesterday was the best, by far, of all of them.

Although Andorra joined the United Nations just 10 years ago, our country is not a new one. Quite the contrary — the Principality of Andorra is one of the oldest and most peaceful nations in the world. Our frontiers have not changed for centuries, and we have practised parliamentary democracy for over half of that time. In fact, we have had uninterrupted peace since 1278.

In the thirteenth century, during the violent period of the Cathar heresies, which created upheaval in our part of the world, two powerful lords — the Count of Foix in the north and the Bishop of Urgell in the south — managed to overcome religious and political differences to negotiate an agreement which made the Andorran State possible. Through the 1993 constitution, we keep their successors — the President of the French Republic and the Bishop of Urgell — as our heads of State in a personal, joint and indivisible manner. The continued existence of Andorra over the centuries has, indeed, been the result of a skilful and constant will to negotiate between our people and their powerful neighbours.

The democratic process which began with the setting up of the Council of the Land in 1419 was essential for our survival as a free community. Although conflicts have also threatened Andorra during its history, mutual understanding has protected us better than have the high peaks of the mountains which surround us or the rigorous winters which isolate us from the outside world for weeks and weeks at a time. When I read Andorran documents from past centuries, I recognize how deeply ideas of independence and respect for others have guaranteed our well-being and our security.

Given the bloody course of European history during previous millenniums, we hold this as a remarkable accomplishment. We have never had an army, nor have we produced one single offensive weapon of any type. Our only weapon has been the wisdom and prudence of our forebears, who had the good sense to keep out of all neighbouring conflicts. That good sense has been inherited by the new generations of young Andorrans — women and men who are very well prepared for the world of today, open to knowledge of new technology and full of legitimate pride in being members of a small State in which they have every chance of being the main agents of their future, but who are, at the same time, perplexed by the growth of new religious fanaticism and exclusiveness and by the return of old fanaticisms, which we had considered forgotten.

At this, the dawn of a new era, we must pass on to them the trust which we have placed in the United Nations and in the supremacy of law over force. This our fathers taught us, and this our children must learn if they are to be worthy members of humankind.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the

Principality of Andorra for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Marc Forné Molné, Prime Minister of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Sanader (Croatia): This is my first address to this body in my capacity as the Prime Minister of Croatia. I feel privileged to be able to present the Assembly with the Croatian Government's strategic priorities in the domain of foreign policy.

I would like at the outset to congratulate Minister Jean Ping on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly and to wish him every success in performing his highly important task. He can rely fully on Croatia's support and cooperation.

For the first time, Croatia is addressing the General Assembly as a candidate country for membership in the European Union. Today, I would like to share with you Croatia's position with respect to the most important tasks facing the United Nations at this time of great multilateral challenges.

The very fact that so many heads of State and Government leaders have gathered here in New York to mark the beginning of the fifty-ninth General Assembly session serves as a telling affirmation that multilateralism is a driving force in global politics and confirms that we live in no ordinary times.

The world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is profoundly different from the one in which the Berlin wall started to crumble. Never before have we faced so many opportunities stemming from new technologies and enhanced regional and global cooperation. And seldom have we encountered as many threats and challenges as we do today.

Tragic events in recent years, from New York to Moscow, from the Middle East all the way to Southern Asia have confirmed that terrorism currently stands out as the most pressing threat to our world, taking, as it has, thousands of innocent lives at random. Equally dangerous is the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). We must resort to all means necessary to prevent the proliferation of these vehicles of death. If the two evils of terrorism and WMDs are synergized, they could bring upon mankind an unforeseeable level of destruction.

Therefore, we must not relax our efforts in the fight against global terrorism nor neglect the deadly impact of WMDs. These issues must remain at the top of our priorities; any hesitation to address them in a timely and appropriate manner could have unforgiving consequences.

The United Nations should continue to play a decisive role in our quest for a stable, secure and prosperous world. Croatia welcomes the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the United Nations (A/59/1) and the implementation of the Millennium Declaration (A/59/282). I would particularly like to commend his reform efforts to date. He has identified many challenges to the United Nations and we should not hesitate to meet them. We particularly share his assessment that the United Nations requires adequate security and institutional agility to adapt to changing circumstances in the world. The Security Council has a paramount responsibility in that regard, but we must not overlook the role of the General Assembly, whose potential is far from being explored to the fullest.

Regarding Security Council reform, Croatia supports the enlargement of the Council in all categories of membership, based on appropriate regional representation.

Let us make the United Nations even more relevant, with a range of inventive and collaborative approaches that will increase the effectiveness of our joint efforts and result in the Organization's increased capability to respond to the needs and realities of the new century.

The credibility of the United Nations does not depend solely on the political will of its Member States and its capacity to manage crises. It also depends on its capacity to respond to the expectations of those who are in dire need of assistance, who cannot protect themselves from imbalances and injustice. We cannot shy away from seeking all available solutions to the fundamental global challenges we face today, including extreme poverty, drug smuggling, the spread of deadly diseases and global climate change. Globalization needs to be mastered; the opportunities it offers need to be assessed and its excesses rectified.

Finding appropriate answers to those fundamental questions requires multilateral cooperation, with a viable and effective United Nations at its core. We all wish to see a strong and decisive United Nations that is capable of effectively responding to current and future challenges, but this cannot happen by default. It depends solely on the contribution and dedication of each and every Member State.

Croatia gained extensive experience in post-conflict management after the war that was imposed upon it in the 1990s, especially in the fields of refugee return, confidence building, prosecuting war crimes, economic reconstruction and the reintegration of war-torn areas with the rest of the country. We stand ready to contribute our knowledge and share it with those who need it.

In confronting alarming challenges, such as security, poverty, terrorism, pandemics and environmental issues, collective action is most likely to yield the best results, since not even the most powerful among us can bear the burden alone.

At this very moment, Croatian peacekeepers are participating in seven United Nations peacekeeping missions. We are determined to further intensify our participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions with respect to the composition and number of troops deployed, as well as the theatres of operation.

We will continue to support the training of peacekeepers from newest troop-contributing countries — whether provided directly or under the auspices of the United Nations — by receiving foreign officers as attendees of the relevant training courses in the Republic of Croatia, as well as by sending Croatian instructors to organize and conduct courses in the newest troop-contributing countries.

Croatia has presented its candidacy for membership in the Security Council for the 2008-2009 term. Our membership would not only represent a great tribute to my country, but also a recognition of all the effort that has been fruitfully invested in the peace and stability of South-East Europe.

We are proud of our achievements since becoming a United Nations Member State in May 1992. From being part of a European powder keg, Croatia grew into one of the key generators and promoters of stability in South-East Europe and beyond. With a growing economy, a greatly expanded highway network and a blossoming tourism industry, Croatia is firmly oriented towards the future. And I can state with confidence that the best is yet to come.

Croatia has successfully embarked upon the road of Euro-Atlantic integration, with a clear goal of European Union and NATO membership. The bedrock of Croatia's foreign policy remains good bilateral relations with all our neighbours and beyond, cross-border and regional cooperation and constructive multilateralism.

My country is speedily preparing for the opening of accession negotiations with the European Union in early 2005. We are confident that Croatia will fully meet all the criteria required in this demanding process on time. We have already demonstrated our reform and decision-making abilities through the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria required for European Union candidate status. This has been far from easy, but in the end, Croatia's success demonstrates that hard work and reform-oriented policies are the best possible investment in a country's future.

Croatia is ready to serve as a model country in South-East Europe, encouraging and assisting our neighbours to realize their Euro-Atlantic ambitions. The prospect of EU membership has proved to be the best incentive for the countries of Central and south-east Europe to implement comprehensive political, economic, institutional and democratic reforms.

A unified Europe is no longer a dream; it is a reality upon which the prosperity and security of the entire continent is based. The European Union is economic prosperity and cooperation; it is stability and security; but, above all, it is its values that stand out so strongly. We all share the same values, the same principles and the same dedication.

A famous Croatian poet, Dobrisa Cesaric, wrote a poem about a waterfall whose beauty and might are created by thousands of small drops of water. Croatia's drop is a part of this wonder, called "one Europe".

Croatia is determined to contribute to the best of its ability to the success of this Organization and to the principles on which it is based. Too often we fail to fathom the true meaning of a phrase that is much more than the mere name of our Organization: the United Nations.

The United Nations — there can be no better global formula in the face of the mounting challenges and the potential, burdens, hopes and expectations of the new century.

Mr. Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Miguel Abia Biteo Boricó, Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Miguel Abia Biteo Boricó, Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Miguel Abia Biteo Boricó, Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

President Abia Biteo Boricó (spoke in Spanish): Although protocol requires that our statements be brief, it is no matter of routine for Equatorial Guinea to congratulate Mr. Jean Ping, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Gabonese Republic, on his well-deserved election to guide the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth regular session.

We congratulate you, Mr. President, because, first, it is right that the voice of the oppressed and marginalized that you represent should be heard loud and clear by the international community. Secondly, we would like also to encourage you, because the task facing you personally and your country, the Gabonese Republic, is to coordinate — and to endeavour to reconcile — the varied and opposing interests that exist in this unipolar, artificial and fragile world, where few speak out, others say nothing or only listen, and yet others speak, but to no effect.

The task is difficult, because we need to rebuild the international authority that has been taken away from the United Nations. We can do this only if there is a spirit of honesty, individual and collective responsibility, and goodwill on the part of Member States, so that selfish interests can be put aside in the common fight to ensure the primacy of the principles and objectives of this world Organization, which are positive and universal.

Mr. President, you will always be able to count on the support and ongoing cooperation of my country, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, in ensuring that your work is fruitful and benefits humankind.

We express our eternal gratitude to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of this Organization, who at all times has been equal to the circumstances and who has dealt with caution, impartiality and justice with the issues that have come to the attention of the Organization over the course of this year. We reiterate our confidence in him and assure him of our cooperation in the task of strengthening the role of the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea is participating in the work of the General Assembly at this session with deep concern because of the dangers and threats posed by the methods used by more powerful countries in intervening in the affairs of less protected nations, such as my own. We believe that the United Nations has still not fulfilled its primary objective of guaranteeing international peace and security. We are living in times of serious upheaval in various parts of the world, brought about by the anarchy that currently characterizes international relations.

Equatorial Guinea will join its efforts with those of the international community in order to strengthen the international authority of the United Nations.

We have come to the United Nations to state publicly that Equatorial Guinea is under threat. We say this out loud, and we hope that we will truly be heard, because we know that complaints by weaker States have often fallen on deaf ears in this forum when the interests of the strongest are at stake.

Equatorial Guinea is facing a serious threat, and we ask the United Nations to take serious, committed measures, not only with regard to the issues affecting Equatorial Guinea today but also in order to prevent other countries in the same situation as ours from being victimized by the same sort of conspiracy in future.

Indeed, my country is being threatened by the incessant and poisonous campaign of defamation against my Government that has been orchestrated by pressure groups and by the press of certain countries — saying that we in Equatorial Guinea do not respect human rights, calling my Government a dictatorship, as well as accusing us of squandering oil revenues. That campaign has as its only objective the justification of an absurd intervention by force in Equatorial Guinea — the failed multinational mercenary invasion that was to have taken place on 6 March last.

The international community is aware of the events connected to that aborted plan thanks to press reports on the trials, held simultaneously in Equatorial Guinea and in Zimbabwe, of those mercenaries who were arrested in Malabo and in Harare, respectively.

Indeed, and under the pretext of supporting the political claims of a supposed opposition leader in exile in Spain, a number of mercenaries, of various nationalities but with a common leadership, acquired a cargo plane with the goal of transporting to Malabo, in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, 65 trained, armed men who were to take part in an invasion — a suicide operation. They planned to occupy previously identified strategic areas, in order physically to remove the President of the Republic, members of the Government and anyone who opposed them.

The invasion, planned for the night of 7 March 2004, would have represented the implementation of an elaborate plan, hatched, elaborated and perfected by another group of 18 men, who had obtained a license to fly cargo and passenger planes in Equatorial Guinea, using the facilities provided by the Government. That group was to join up with those coming from Harare.

The support that they received from Spain was to involve the use of two Spanish Navy warships with 500 sailors on board, for support in case of resistance. The goal was to put in power, at Government headquarters, Mr. Severo Moto Nsa, who had formed a government in exile that was recognized by the previous Government of Spain.

Fortunately, the solidarity of the Governments of Angola, Zimbabwe and South Africa came into play and they alerted the security services of my country, which acted immediately, arresting, on the night of 6 March, the 18 men stationed in Malabo, while the Harare Government did the same with those found in that capital's airport on 7 March 2004.

The mercenaries themselves, in public statements during the trials held in Malabo and in Harare, explained the plan's objectives and named the people involved. They also gave details on the financing of the purchase of arms and of the cargo plane, and on the offer of the Spanish ships, which were already, at that time, anchored in the territorial waters of Equatorial Guinea.

The Secretary-General, as well as the Members of this Organization, should know that, a month before those events, my Government had rejected and denounced the sending of those warships to Equatorial Guinea in a note to the Spanish Government, which at the time was using as a pretext its support for the Government of Equatorial Guinea in the conflict related to its claim of sovereignty over the island of Mbañie. This General Assembly can, I am sure, understand the danger and the loss of human life that this invasion would have caused if it had succeeded.

We know that Equatorial Guinea is a victim for the sole reason that it has respected the principles and exercised the fundamental rights of a sovereign State, which are the exercise of sovereignty by the people, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the right to the exclusive use of the resources that nature has given it. If this is so, we would like the Assembly to reply to the following questions, if possible.

Why are so many negative things currently being said about Equatorial Guinea in foreign circles, when the country's people themselves live in peace and there are no demands being made by the populace or from the people's representative bodies?

Why this talk of dictatorship and oppression in Equatorial Guinea, when the administration in power has re-established political freedom in the country, with 13 political parties in a country of barely one million people?

Can a dictatorship based on oppression allow freedom such as the current level of foreign investment and the arrival of more than seventeen international flights per week to such a small country as Equatorial Guinea?

Is there an international police force that has the authority to tell Equatorial Guinea how to use its economic resources, when we already have an administrative and political organization for managing our resources with transparency? Can a country that does not use its resources for the benefit of the people approve an annual budget, through parliament, of 618 billion CFA francs as a justifiable public cost?

Is it true that the only way to end the abuse allegedly committed by Equatorial Guinea would be to organize the kind of terrorist and mercenary invasion targeted at eliminating innocent people that was planned on 6 March 2004?

Equatorial Guinea would like to know whether this mercenary system is supported by the international community. If it is supported, which countries are responsible for this crime? We do not believe that there is any difference between the terrorism that we condemn today and the terrorist acts committed by mercenaries in various parts of the world.

Equatorial Guinea is seriously under threat. We say this because we know from reliable sources that our enemies will not forgive the embarrassment and defeat caused by the failure of the mercenary invasion on 6 March. However, this does not mean that Equatorial Guinea is going to drop its arms or fall on its knees and let the enemy do with it what it will. We believe that the United Nations responsibility is to maintain peace and international security and to avoid a merciless war between countries.

We would like to affirm that there are countries who are Members of this global Organization, represented in this hemicycle, whose security agencies were informed of this devilish plan, and who, unlike Angola, South Africa and Zimbabwe, who expressed their solidarity, simply kept silent, waiting for events to unfold. But we ask you to leave us in peace, because Equatorial Guinea is a peaceful country and we do not think that we have offended anyone.

A detailed analysis of the situation has shown us that the end of the cold war has not actually led to the unification of humanity and the integration of the world as we had hoped. Rather, it has rekindled selfish and perverse feelings among those who have always dominated — or have always wanted to dominate — the world. The phenomenon of mercenaries, therefore, is a classic practice of States' piracy, politically dressed up and falsely justified by political, economic and humanitarian interests. This is why we continue to see this defamatory campaign, to justify a possible invasion.

Nevertheless, Equatorial Guinea does not need to please the international community with propaganda regarding our development. Our only judge and arbiter is our own people, to which our State institutions must justify their actions. This tactic of creating a falsified negative image of a State is of no surprise to anybody at the moment, and it should least of all be a surprise to this world Organization.

We also see that the theory of a globalized world is a fallacy, because, as we very often say, you cannot call a dog to you while holding a stick to beat it. We cannot accept globalization when the concept of colonialism, the superiority of some peoples over others or even of neo-colonialism still exists. Globalization is in contradiction with the concept of the superiority of some over others. Globalization does not mean exclusion as opposed to integration and cooperation. Finally, globalization does not mean power relations such as those that some would like to impose.

The situation in Equatorial Guinea affects other countries of Central Africa as well, as the terrorists themselves have declared. We know that the mercenaries have acted in other parts of the world, and we bring this to the General Assembly because of the destructive effects that have been seen in other affected countries. We feel that solidarity among African States and the third world in general is absolutely indispensable, because we are the direct victims of those who are ordering these mercenary acts.

In conclusion, we must stop looking backwards. The current breakdown of the forces of peace, independence and the sovereignty of States, as the antithesis to the major wars of the past century, shows us that we are close to unleashing a universal holocaust. The situation today is that the weakest and most needy are ignored and marginalized. We have to put a stop to this race to chaos and build a world that is more respectful of the human race.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Miguel Abia Biteo Boricó, Prime Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, it gives me great pleasure to begin my statement by congratulating you, Sir, and your friendly country, the Gabonese Republic, on your election as President of the fifty-ninth session of this Assembly. Given your political skills and experience, we are confident that you will competently and successfully lead our deliberations on pressing global and regional issues. We wish you every success in your endeavours.

On this occasion, I wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, for his wise and skilful management of the activities of the previous session. It also gives me pleasure to reiterate our appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his consistent efforts to strengthen the leading role of the United Nations, especially in resolving the political conflicts and economic crises that continue to plague our world.

Notwithstanding the achievements of the last century and their positive impact on the principles of liberalization, globalization and freedom, recent events, especially during the last few years, have included, violations of human rights, the outbreak of terrorist attacks and the eruption of violence and conflicts. These events have, to a great extent, limited peoples' ability to reap the benefits of most of these achievements. Instead of directing efforts towards solving the problems related to poverty, the spread of epidemics, improving sustainable economic, environmental and social development mechanisms and strengthening international relations — as outlined in the Millennium Declaration — the world had to devote a great part of its efforts to further exploring coordinated measures for combating these grave threats, which have shaken the underpinnings of international peace and security.

Previous experience has shown that regional and international multilateral initiatives built on principles of partnership, justice, transparency and equality among peoples and States can address and contain global challenges. Therefore, we are convinced that carrying out the reform needed in the existing structures of international relations, especially in the United Nations system, has become an important priority so that its principal organs — the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — can revitalize their activities and fulfil their responsibilities in terms of maintaining international peace and security.

Commitment by all countries and governments to discharge their responsibilities in accordance with the principles of international law is a key condition for enforcing the rule of law and avoiding potential economic, environmental and security problems. Therefore, the United Arab Emirates, as a Member of the United Nations, is committed to meet its obligations, especially those related to promoting friendly relations with neighbouring countries, cooperation in the security and economic fields and respect for the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination of all countries.

Proceeding from its belief in the value of dialogue, peaceful negotiations and legal arbitration in settling conflicts and disputes among countries, the United Arab Emirates has pursued a firm and peaceful policy regarding the question of the occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of our three islands: Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abou Moussa. The international community is now aware of the legal, historical and political grounds of this case, as well as all the initiatives, contacts and constant efforts by my country at various levels to find a peaceful solution to this question.

The United Arab Emirates is perplexed at the position of Iran and its constant rejection of all peaceful initiatives and endeavours by the member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council to find a peaceful solution to this important issue. Therefore, the United Arab Emirates calls upon the international community to urge Iran either to clarify its intentions towards the United Arab Emirates by entering unconditionally into serious bilateral negotiations which ensure restoration of the three occupied islands, their continental shelves and regional airspace and their economic zones to the full sovereignty and territorial unity of the United Arab Emirates, or to accept referral of this case to the International Court of Justice for arbitration.

The regrettable developments taking place on the security front in the Arabian Gulf region have created serious challenges to the international community due to the sensitive nature of this region and the emergence of new forms of threats, which include terrorist acts, kidnappings and arbitrary killing of hundreds of innocent people in various areas in Iraq and other countries. In this context, the United Arab Emirates expresses its strong condemnation of all acts of violence in Iraq, which if not contained will lead to an escalation of tension and instability in the entire region, as well as the world. We also express our support to the legitimate endeavours of the Iraqi people and their interim Government to complete arrangements for a peaceful transition of authority as soon as possible, to exercise their inalienable right to decide their political future and internal affairs, control their natural resources, rebuild their national institutions and maintain security on their borders.

We also attach great importance to supporting international and regional efforts to help the Iraqi people to rehabilitate their destroyed institutions, and to the unity and solidarity of the Iraqi people especially during this critical stage, in order to enable them to start a new phase in which security, stability, good-neighbourly relations and cooperation with all countries of the world prevail.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its strong condemnation of all acts of terrorism in the Gulf region, especially in the fraternal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other areas where a number of residential areas were targets of horrific terrorist attacks. The United Arab Emirates declares its full support for the continuing efforts and measures taken by these countries to combat those inadmissible acts, including those by the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to defeat those criminal terrorist attempts inside Saudi territory.

The United Arab Emirates believes that settlement of the Middle East question cannot be achieved with the position of a de facto situation of occupation, settlement, and siege of the Palestinian people, who are now facing the worst humanitarian crisis in their history because of the acts of arbitrary killing, destruction, starvation and unjustified mass detentions by the Israeli authorities. The United Arab Emirates affirms that continuation of the Israeli aggression will inevitably lead to more violence and deterioration in the security situation.

We therefore recall the historical, political and legal responsibility of the United Nations and the Quartet, which is now responsible for finding a settlement of the Palestinian question through obliging Israel, the occupying Power, to unconditionally comply with the terms of the road map and other relevant international resolutions, especially those issued by the International Court of Justice and the General Assembly that call for dismantling the racist separation wall in the West Bank, as it is considered illegal and null and void.

We also affirm that establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region depends on the ability of the international community to end Israel's intransigence, on revitalization of the peace process and on full Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and the Shab'a farms. It depends also on the establishment of a Palestinian State with its capital at Al-Quds al-Sharif, pursuant to the relevant international resolutions and the fundamentals of the existing Arab peace initiative, which is based on the principle of land for peace. In that context, we also affirm the importance of respecting the wishes of the Lebanese people and of not interfering in its internal affairs.

Attaining and maintaining balance in the security situation in the Middle East and the Gulf region is today a matter of high priority. It requires a comprehensive, non-discriminatory, confidence-building policy that will lead to the elimination of all existing arsenals of weapons of mass destruction as part of an international process of non-proliferation. Here, we look forward to the outcome of the recent visit of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to a number of countries in the region, which was aimed at convincing their Governments to relinquish the nuclear arsenals that pose a threat to neighbouring countries.

In that connection, we renew our appeal to the international community to take all necessary measures to compel the Israeli Government to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to subject all its nuclear facilities to the IAEA international safeguards system, so that a zone free of weapons of mass destruction can be established in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East regions.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the world economic and social situation reveal that almost a billion people lack food, drinking water, job opportunities, housing and educational, health and social services. The United Arab Emirates has a good record of providing development and relief assistance to many countries, and we believe that the international community should address those challenges as its common responsibility, requiring complete fulfilment of the commitments and pledges made by developed nations at United Nations conferences and summits on sustainable development and on financing for development. Those pledges relate to increasing assistance to developing countries, rescheduling foreign debt, easing restrictions on foreign trade, increasing foreign investment and providing access to modern technologies for peaceful purposes. That would enable developing countries to share equally in the benefits of globalization.

Further, we welcome current efforts to set up a global fund to end poverty by 2015. Here, we affirm that there must be progress in negotiations on North-South cooperation and on coordination among regional and international organizations if we are to put an end to the negative effects of repeated financial and economic crises and ensure steady assistance flows and the stability of commodity markets. Policies and choices to liberalize world trade and the world economy must be reviewed from a development perspective, taking into account the concerns and needs of small countries and developing countries, and their right to attain development and participate in the international decision-making process. This would enable their economies to avoid stagnation and marginalization, and would ensure the implementation of national programmes to diversify national production, develop human resources and reduce levels of unemployment, poverty and disease.

We hope that our deliberations at this session will have a positive outcome that will enhance our perception of our common causes and buttress our joint efforts to create a prosperous world based on the rule of law and justice, a world in which tolerance, well-being and progress prevail.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rodolphe Adada, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*spoke in French*): The election of Mr. Jean Ping to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session does honour to our continent, to our subregion of Central Africa and to his country, Gabon. I congratulate him sincerely on behalf of my delegation. We are familiar with Mr. Ping's high sense of duty, his selfless dedication to his work and his great skill, and we have no doubt that — like his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Julian Hunte of Saint Lucia — he will spare no effort to meet our expectations.

To the Secretary-General we say how much we appreciate his initiatives and his tireless efforts to make the Organization more effective.

At the Millennium Summit, Member States made solemn and very important commitments. Today, despite the fact that some progress has been made in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, the situation remains troubling. The assessment of the implementation of the Goals scheduled for 2005 is thus of particular importance. Here, we support all initiatives that would give fresh impetus to international cooperation to combat poverty and hunger. I am thinking in particular of the initiative of His Excellency President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Federative Republic of Brazil, which rightly focuses on the Millennium Development Goals and on the Monterrey Consensus. The African Union's Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, held on 8 and 9 September in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, was also intended to address those concerns.

In spite of all the problems that have hobbled the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations, the resumption of negotiations this summer in Geneva gives us some reason to hope for the establishment of equitable rules of international trade. We continue to hope for greater equity and solidarity among poor and rich nations with a view to achieving globalization that is fair. We therefore support the recommendations of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization.

To meet the Millennium Development Goals, we also need peace and security — which, unfortunately, are lacking in a number of regions. The situation in the Middle East continues to concern us. Peace, that fundamental aspiration, remains beyond the grasp of the peoples of the region; it is our joint responsibility to put in place the conditions for lasting peace.

In Africa, the attention of the international community remains focused on the too-great number of crises. To be sure, we can be pleased at recent developments in the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, following the Accra III summit, but we must continue to work to make the process irreversible.

In the Sudan, the Darfur crisis continues to be of great concern, in both its humanitarian and its political dimensions. A greater mobilization by the international community is required to support the efforts of the African Union. The objective is to avoid a disaster and to ensure peace for the people of the Sudan.

In our subregion of Central Africa, we were pleased with the positive outcome on 12 July 2004 of the national forum held in Sao Tome and Principe, scheduled under the Memorandum of Understanding, dated 23 July 2003, and concluded under the auspices of the Economic Community of Central African States, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, the African Union, the United States of America and Nigeria.

In the Central African Republic, where there is still a peacekeeping force of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, supported logistically by France, our hope is to see the democratic process move forward and proceed to the general elections which are scheduled for 2005.

We welcome the efforts of the international community in Burundi — in particular, the South African mediation — for the results achieved to date. We call upon the political leaders of that country to remain focused on the national interests. Unity and development in Burundi depend on that.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, political life in the eastern part of the country in particular has recently been marked by a number of grave events such as the Ituri crisis, the Bukavu rebellion and the Gatumba massacres. We renew our support for the global and inclusive agreement, as well as for the institutions for transition.

We call on the international community to continue to pay all the attention required to that country, and we support all initiatives that would increase troop strength and the means of action of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is in that context that we are pleased with today's signature of the terms of reference of the joint oversight mechanism between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

That overview of the political situation in our subregion, which includes a number of countries in post-conflict situations, fully justifies the request of Central Africa to have a United Nations office. We are pleased with the existence of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Questions of Security in Central Africa and, in particular, the work given to that Committee. We wish to continue to have the input of the Committee in its relations with the competent bodies of the subregion, in light of what is at stake.

Similarly, we expect implementation of the conclusions of the multifaceted mission that was dispatched to Central Africa in June 2003 by the Secretary-General. We appreciate those conclusions as being very relevant, especially those establishing programmes for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to help consolidate the peace processes taking place; helping to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS; stopping the circulation of small arms and light weapons; protecting the environment and creating conditions for development in Central Africa.

In order to meet all of the challenges and to establish all the conditions required for stability, we are placing our hopes on the international conference for peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region, preparations for which are already under way. That conference will undoubtedly be an excellent opportunity to search for lasting solutions to the recurrent crises that cause bloodshed in the region. I reiterate my country's willingness to make its contribution to that process.

As you know, the Republic of the Congo is among the countries in our subregion which is in a post-conflict situation. Under the leadership of President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, Congo is endeavouring at the same time, to consolidate peace and to re-establish a comprehensive macroeconomic equilibrium.

Among our current priorities, the question of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration continues to be very important. Our national programme concerning those issues will, for the 2004-2006 period, involve more than 40,000 ex-combatants.

The efforts of the Government, which are supported — and we appreciate that support — by the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, will be continued. We would also appreciate any other contribution that would help the Congolese Government resolve that thorny issue.

Additionally, Congo, in hoping to benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, is very sensitive to the decisions taken in Paris on 9 and 14 September 2004, respectively, by the Paris Club and the donors. Here I reiterate the appreciation of my Government for those efforts. Congo's eligibility for that Initiative will undoubtedly allow us to allocate a majority of our resources for development and therefore to follow up with what was contained in our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which we expect will be validated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

That would help us succeed in our efforts, within our national plan, concerning good governance and transparency in the management of our national affairs. Therefore, in following up on those various objectives, our country has joined the African Peer Review Mechanism under the New Partnership for Africa's Development and we have signed on to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

Concerning the environment, we are involved in a partnership with the international community concerning the Congo Basin Initiative. Brazzaville will shortly host a summit that will consider plans to conserve the forests of this world heritage area. We therefore welcome the support given to that plan by France, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, Germany, South Africa and a number of non-governmental organizations.

Congo reiterates its support for multilateralism. We remain convinced that the United Nations is the ideal framework for meeting the challenges that face the world. But the world has changed. New challenges are before us that require reforms that will allow the United Nations to adapt itself to current missions and the global configuration of the twenty-first century.

We therefore welcome the reform process undertaken by the Secretary-General and are truly hopeful regarding the recommendations of the high-level panel which was set up to examine the principle threats and challenges to collective peace and security and to make proposals with respect to reform of the international system.

Among the reforms expected, we firmly support the idea of enlarging the Security Council in its two components, namely, permanent and non-permanent members. We must take into account — among other things — the diversity of today's world in order to highlight the criteria of geographical representation and of responsibility in the management of worldwide affairs, without ever sacrificing effectiveness, cohesion, transparency or credibility.

As was stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his statement to the General Assembly at the 3rd meeting, on 21 September, "today, more than ever, the world needs an effective mechanism through which to seek common solutions to common problems." In order do this, we must not only act together in complying with the rules that we ourselves have implemented, but we must also comply with the commitments we have made.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. Several representatives have requested to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Vengesa (Zimbabwe): I make this statement on behalf of my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Stanislaus I. G. Mudenge.

> "The Minister of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed concern about what he called the situation in Zimbabwe. I am not sure whether by 'situation in Zimbabwe' he is alluding to the recent successful land reform and redistribution exercise, which we have just completed. I want to assure the Minister that the exercise, far from being a cause for concern, is truly a reason for celebration — a fulfilment of the liberation struggle.
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> "Secondly, the Minister urges my country to comply with the Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) guidelines for democratic elections, which were adopted by SADC last month. The Minister is being rather arrogant and

> presumptuous by positing himself and his colleagues as the enforcers of the SADC guidelines. Those guidelines belong to SADC, a group of free independent former colonies in southern Africa that do not accept any tutelage, especially from former colonial masters we fought and defeated only yesterday. Zimbabwe was an active partner in the formulation of the SADC guidelines and has already taken prompt and firm steps to implement those guidelines.
>
> "Thirdly, Zimbabwe calls on the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States to desist from their daily, poisonous anti-Zimbabwe-Government propaganda emanating from their clandestine radio stations. Those three countries are destabilizing my country through radio programmes targeted at my country. I say to the Netherlands: stop your wicked broadcasts against my country through your so-called 'voice of the people' station, the United States through the 'Studio 7' station and the British through the so-called 'short-wave' radio station. Those weapons of mass deception have been unleashed against my country for the last two years.
>
> "Furthermore, I call upon the Netherlands and those among its allies who are pouring millions of dollars into non-governmental organizations (NGO), and even through church leaders, to support the opposition party in my country, to desist from this blatant interference in the internal affairs of my country.
>
> "Lastly, I hope that the Netherlands will be prepared to accept the verdict of the people of Zimbabwe next year, when they once again reject the British-sponsored, and Dutch-supported, puppet opposition party in my country."

Mrs. Hasteh (Islamic Republic of Iran): This evening, the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates made some unacceptable claims against the territorial integrity of my country. As we have clearly and repeatedly placed on record our position on that issue on previous occasions, I do not need to go into details. The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to its international obligations, especially those arising from the memorandum of understanding of 1971. We firmly believe that misunderstandings over the interpretation or application of that memorandum of understanding, if any, should be addressed with good will and through mutually agreed mechanisms, in order to find an acceptable solution.

Meanwhile, my Government has always welcomed the interaction and exchange of views between officials of Iran and the United Arab Emirates on issues of interest and concern to both our countries. We believe that dialogue between our two Governments can play a determining role in removing any existing misunderstandings.

Mr. Al-Habsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country, which has always been keen to express its firm and principled position with regard to the national cause just referred to, must again reiterate its deep disappointment about the repeated claims made by the representatives of Iran annually in this Hall. Those claims contravene all historical and legal documents and demographic facts that prove that the three islands in question are part of the sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates. It is for that reason that we today raised the question of why Iran has not submitted factual proof and legal and historical evidence and documents to show that that country has been entitled, since 1971, to occupy those three islands belonging to the United Arab Emirates, as well as to change the historical, political and demographic character of the islands.

Therefore, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law, we call upon the international community to work to urge the Government of Iran to translate its good intentions towards the United Arab Emirates by either unconditionally entering into direct bilateral negotiations in order, once and for all, to put an end to the occupation of the three islands and return them to their original Arab inhabitants, or by resorting to the International Court of Justice for a legal settlement of the issue, following the examples provided by similar cases that have thus been resolved.

My country, which believes that stability in the Arabian Gulf region requires the establishment of good-neighbourly relations on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, independence and integrity of all Member States, will be committed to accepting the ruling of the International Court of Justice, as we are confident about our political, legal and historical rights to the three islands in question, which are an integral part of our homeland and of the territorial integrity, air space, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone of the United Arab Emirates, which is indivisible and should not be jeopardized under any circumstances.

Mr. Hamburger (Netherlands): I will be very brief. The Netherlands, speaking in its capacity as President of the European Union, regrets Zimbabwe's reaction to the European Union's statement delivered yesterday by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands. We wish to reiterate the European Union's commitment to the rule of law, including the need for free and fair elections. We consider that an international standard to which all countries should adhere.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Spain on a point of order.

Mr. Oyarzún (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I simply want to say that, given the comments made by the Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea — in which he referred to Spain — my delegation reserves its right of reply, which it will exercise at the appropriate time.

The meeting rose at 8.30 p.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.7

General Assembly

Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

7th plenary meeting
Thursday, 23 September 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping .... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Address by Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Senegal.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Wade (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal would like to congratulate you very warmly, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I assure you of our full support as you carry out your noble work. I also wish to extend my congratulations and encouragement to all the members of the Bureau.

I would also like to recognize the commitment of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose tireless efforts to make the United Nations a strong, working and credible Organization reflects his faith in the ideals of peace, development and concord among peoples. We must now continue to breathe life into these ideals, so that current and future generations will have a peaceful and safe world, a world without absurd hatred or gratuitous violence. This vision should lead us to reinvigorate the values of multilateralism and universality that are epitomized by our Organization. In other words, the world needs now, more than ever, a United Nations that is strong and strengthened in its legitimacy.

We welcome, therefore, the decision of the United Nations Secretary-General to establish a panel of eminent persons on threats, challenges and change, whose conclusions will be presented next December. In this respect, we recall the African position on reform of the Security Council, which advocates among other things, the assignment to Africa of at least two permanent seats and two extra non-permanent seats. Africa would choose the recipients of those seats according to a process that has yet to be determined.

As I extol universality, I feel it is unfair that the Republic of China on Taiwan, with its 23 million inhabitants, its major democratic system and its impressive economic vitality, would still be sidelined from the work of the United Nations, whose Charter does rightly enshrine the essential principles of justice and universality.

This denial of justice also affects the valiant people of Palestine, who, under the legitimate authority of President Yasser Arafat, have been deprived of its fundamental right to sovereignty and ongoing existence. The defiant attitude of the occupying Power vis-à-vis the international community, recently illustrated by the Israeli authorities' refusal to abide by the opinion of the International Court of Justice requiring Israel to immediately stop the illegal building

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of the separation wall in Palestinian territory, imperils the foundations of international legality. I solemnly appeal to the international community and, in particular, to the members of the Quartet, asking them to persevere in their efforts for an immediate resumption of dialogue, so that we may achieve a fair, equitable and lasting solution to this disagreement. The peoples of Palestine and Israel, needless to recall, are condemned by history and geography to live together.

For our part, Senegal, which chairs the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will continue, with its people, to unfailingly support the Palestinian people, battered by this crisis that has lasted far too long. As a contribution to the quest for peace, I suggested that we conduct a special meeting, outside our regular work, on the situation in Palestine aimed at enhancing the work launched by the Quartet and in the spirit of the road map, in order to establish by 2005 a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with the State of Israel, within safe and internationally recognized borders guaranteed for the two States. This initiative, which has already been endorsed by the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union, will provide an opportunity to mobilize the international community around the effective implementation of the road map.

In awarding me yesterday the 2004 Human Rights Award, the International League for Human Rights in fact honoured, through Senegal's head of State, all of the Senegalese people, a people attached to freedom and to the respect of human dignity. My Government will continue to work to promote and protect human rights, the rule of law and good public and private governance. In talking about human rights, I am naturally thinking of the fundamental rights of women, children, disabled persons, seniors and all vulnerable people. This deep commitment to mankind motivated my decision to submit draft legislation to the Senegalese national assembly to abolish capital punishment in Senegal.

Almost 60 years after the establishment of our Organization, our world, which is so fragile, still sees longstanding dangers such as nuclear proliferation and the emergence of new dangers such as terrorism and AIDS, which represent a serious threat to international peace and security. I must remind Members here of the need to do more to strengthen, under the leadership of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, the mechanisms that already exist for cooperation and technical assistance in order to provide those countries who so wish human, technical and adequate financial resources to combat terrorism. This initiative, of course, must be paired with States' increased adherence to treaties and protocols in this key area. It is for this purpose that the African Union adopted last July an additional protocol to the Organization of African Unity's Algiers Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, proposed by Senegal on 17 October 2001 at the African conference on terrorism, held in Dakar.

This collective approach should also be adopted to tackle the difficult problem of small arms and light weapons. Senegal supports making the moratorium on the importation, exportation and production of small arms and light weapons of the Economic Community of West African States into a convention in West Africa, since these arms are truly weapons of mass destruction in our subregion.

There are other destructive scourges. I would like to speak about AIDS. In accordance with the declaration that we adopted in 2001, we must act more quickly and more vigorously in critical areas such as prevention and access to antiretroviral treatments if we really do wish to stop this disease and its devastating effects. Since antiretroviral medication is now free for all those who are afflicted, thanks to our tenacity, Senegal has remained a success story in combating AIDS.

Another seemingly ignored ill is poliomyelitis, which we have completely eliminated in Senegal. However, this scourge remains as serious as ever in the rest of Africa.

During this second trimester of 2004, the North and West parts of Africa have witnessed the invasion of swarms of locusts, the dreaded scourge which has infested large agricultural areas in the region of the Sahel and some North African countries. This threat, which has already destroyed entire civilizations, is now compromising the lives of tens of millions of people right before harvest time. At the very beginning, I personally sounded the alarm, speaking to the international community in Rome last March. Despite another appeal by the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), assistance was late in coming and is only now under way, but in ways that are not very effective.

Whatever the case may be, Senegal has begun to work on this issue, and today we are succeeding in containing this danger. Together with neighbouring countries, the countries bordering the Sahel, we are trying to launch an extensive campaign for the final elimination of these locusts. In this regard, we note with great satisfaction the involvement of African countries, including Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Libya and Egypt in this issue. Today, our people remain concerned about the possible migration of these locusts, carried by the wind, to other areas in the region, in particular to the Maghreb. We are also pleased to announce that we have received substantial support by the World Bank, among other international organizations. This means that we have a shared responsibility to strengthen and mobilize the international community against locusts and, if we succeed in saving the crops, to completely eliminate them, starting at their source.

The task at hand in this area should not make us lose sight of the huge field of work that remains to be tackled, namely combating the poverty that strikes millions of people throughout the world, in particular in the least developed countries so that we can achieve the Millennium Development Goals in terms of agriculture. I must say here that I am satisfied with the outcome of the meeting that was held on the initiative of President Lula, the President of Brazil.

Yet we all see and are concerned that, as has been emphasized by the Secretary-General and others, in spite of the relative improvement in the economic situation in Africa since 1995, the chances of our continent achieving the Millennium Development Goals are still rather low given the lack of progress to date. Implementation of those Goals is particularly at risk even at a time when the world economy is progressing in an encouraging way: Africa continues, mainly because of the export subsidies of developed countries, to be marginalized in world trade. It is a truism to say that those subsidies help to impoverish African producer countries and increase unemployment.

Another problem is the thorny issue of African debt. The continent has dedicated itself to resolution of this problem: next year we will hold a major summit preceded by a technical meeting on ending Africa's indebtedness.

The Extraordinary Summit of the African Union on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa, just held in Ouagadougou on 8 and 9 September, illustrates our continent's determination to continue to devote special attention to the fight against unemployment, which is a key priority for development. A successful outcome — in keeping with the outcomes of the various summits which have given direction to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) — requires the international community to make a stronger commitment, alongside Africa, to help materialize this important partnership programme. And that is why I say that I am pleased to see the progress we have made on NEPAD financing since the Group of Eight (G-8) meeting in Kananaskis, Canada.

Although insufficiently highlighted, efforts for African development made under NEPAD and the support actions of the international community — particularly those taken by the G-8 and the United Nations system — are still in evidence, which pleases me. We have made basically two proposals. The first has to do with the convening in Senegal's capital of an agricultural forum, on the model of the Davos economic forum, for the purpose, inter alia, of closing the world agricultural gap. It will be held in February 2005 in Dakar.

The ever-growing digital divide separates the developed countries from the developing countries. In December 2003 in Geneva, the Secretary-General convened The World Summit on the Information Society. On that occasion, Africa proposed, through myself, the idea of digital solidarity among peoples and the establishment of a digital solidarity fund based on volunteer efforts and not funded by any mandatory tax. That idea was received with unanimous enthusiasm by developing countries — Africa, Asia, Brazil, the Middle East — and by a developed country: France. Subsequently, the inaugural congress for the United Cities and Local Governments organization was held in Paris in May 2004; participants officially announced their participation in the digital solidarity fund. To the cities already mentioned elsewhere, I could add Rome, Paris, Lille and Bilbao.

We are pleased that the Secretary-General has established a task force on financing the information society under the decision adopted at Geneva. Providing Africa with the hardware and other computer technology it needs is the only way to give us access to the knowledge that accelerates development and, which, in turn, will help to close the digital divide.

As members can see, the challenges we face are enormous, numerous and pressing. The time has come to strengthen the foundations of international cooperation and, once and for all, to exorcize the risk of social bipolarization throughout the world where affluence rubs elbows with the most extreme poverty and where the values of solidarity and respect for the sacredness of human life become vain words. That is why I suggested that we hold an international conference in Dakar on an Islamic-Christian dialogue, whose objectives would be to help us better understand one another, to strengthen peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians and to promote a dialogue among cultures.

Thus, by hosting the eleventh Islamic Summit in 2006, Senegal, which has a majority Muslim population living in perfect harmony with their Christian brothers, will continue its action to promote fruitful inter-religious dialogue focused on the sacrosanct principle of respect for the cultural and religious identities of all peoples.

The President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Senegal for the statement he has just made.

> *Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

Address by Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus

The President *(spoke in French)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Cyprus.

> *Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

The President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Papadopoulos: I wish, Sir, to express to you my most sincere congratulations on your election as President of this session of the General Assembly and to wish you every success in steering the work of this body. I would also like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, especially for his inspired efforts to promote so vigorously the agenda of United Nations reform and the revitalization of the General Assembly.

As this is the last session of the General Assembly before the 2005 major event, we must proceed to evaluate the prospects for attaining the ambitious targets we set at the turn of the millennium. The major event will be the first real assessment of our progress towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, of the outcomes of major world conferences and of initiatives such as the action launched by the Presidents of Brazil, France and Chile and the Prime Minister of Spain to eradicate poverty and hunger, and the initiative of the Presidents of Finland and Tanzania on the social dimensions of globalization.

Specifically with regard to the Millennium Development Goals, we believe that the ability to make development on the ground an issue of global concern as a result of those pledges will be a measure of the ability of the United Nations to induce significant change and advances where they are most needed.

The Republic of Cyprus supports the strengthening of the United Nations system through the reform process that is under way and looks forward to the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the recommendations of the Secretary-General. We attach particular importance to the revitalization of the General Assembly and to the reform of the Security Council so that its structure will reflect contemporary political realities and a more balanced geographical representation. In the spirit of those two principles, and with the aim of reinforcing the legitimacy and efficacy of the Council, Cyprus is supportive of increasing both the permanent and the non-permanent membership. In that respect, we believe that the joint French and German position on the enlargement of the Council could provide a basis for achieving the aforementioned objectives.

We share the assessment of the Secretary-General that consolidating effective multilateralism in a flexible and versatile United Nations is the best way to address the complete spectrum of global crises and ensure that preventive mechanisms exist to avert such crises. Such consolidation applies also to security deficits and particularly terrorism, whose underlying causes we have been unable to eliminate despite our concerted efforts. We consider that the conclusion of a comprehensive United Nations convention against terrorism is important in order to address more resolutely, within the framework of international legality, the threat posed by terrorism.

Addressing other deficiencies in the international system — particularly those that give rise to crisis situations and to humanitarian disasters — should also be considered a matter of both urgency and priority. One such crisis is Darfur, which, following many others like it, keeps Africa at the heart of our concerns. It demonstrates not only why we should focus the majority of our humanitarian resources and peacekeeping efforts on Africa, but also why we should undertake every possible effort to make sustainable development a global reality.

The Middle East is another region that remains volatile, despite growing global concern and despite many attempts to restore the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We deem to be necessary more active involvement by the Quartet in the efforts to implement the road map and put an end to the cycle of violence. More emphasis should also be placed on the task of improving living conditions in order to normalize people's lives to the greatest possible extent. Our support remains focused on ending the occupation, achieving a just and viable settlement based on United Nations resolutions, and the realization of the Palestinian people's aspirations for the establishment of an independent State, living side by side with Israel in conditions of sustainable peace and security.

The aspirations of humanity revolve around the achievement of full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The collective vision and effort required to fulfil that massive endeavour demands the contribution of all, to the extent of their capabilities. Cyprus is prepared to play its part from its vantage point in the European Union, while drawing upon its traditional participation in forums dedicated to promoting agendas pertaining to those values. That affiliation has been a source of support for us since Cyprus's independence, and its impact not only makes us grateful but also has endowed us with sensitivities that will continue to be an integral part of our approach.

I would like to emphasize how proud we are that Cyprus is now a member of the European Union. The Union has outlined an extensive set of priorities for this session of the General Assembly. As the statement delivered Tuesday by the Dutch presidency has delineated those priorities, I will not elaborate on them any further.

This year marks 30 years since the occupation of 37 per cent of Cyprus's territory as a result of the invasion of the island by Turkish troops. It also marks 30 years of relentless efforts by the Greek Cypriots to achieve a just and peaceful settlement, with the support of the international community, for which I would here like to express our deep appreciation.

The Secretary-General's most recent effort to solve the Cyprus problem resulted in a plan that was described by some as a historic opportunity to solve one of the most long-standing international problems. I will outline only briefly why, despite the hard work invested in the process by everyone involved, the end product of that effort was judged to have been inadequate and to have fallen short of minimum expectations for a settlement for Greek Cypriots.

First, the Annan Plan was not the product of negotiation, nor did it constitute an agreed solution between the parties. Secondly, the Plan did not place the necessary emphasis on achieving a one-State solution with a central Government able to guarantee the single, sovereign character of Cyprus. Thirdly, it failed to address the serious concerns of the Greek Cypriot community regarding their security and the effective implementation of the Plan.

In rejecting the Plan as a settlement for the Cyprus problem, the Greek Cypriots did not reject the solution or the reunification of their country; they rejected this particular Plan as not effectively achieving that objective. We remain committed to a solution that will ensure the reunification of our country, its economy and its people.

We are committed to reaching a solution on the basis of a bizonal, bicommunal federation. There are, however, a number of essential parameters on which the Greek Cypriot community insists such a solution must be founded: the withdrawal of Turkish troops and settlers and respect for the human rights of all Cypriots, the underlying structures for a functioning economy, the functionality and workability of the new state of affairs, the just resolution of land and property issues in accordance with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, and respect for the right of return of refugees. To that end, we welcome the recent Pinheiro progress report on the restitution of property in the context of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Simultaneously, it distresses me to bring to the attention of the Assembly that certain provisions of the Annan Plan have encouraged the unprecedented unlawful exploitation of properties in occupied Cyprus that belong to Greek Cypriots.

The most paramount feature of any settlement is the ability to instil a sense of security among the people. In that regard, the mistakes of the past must not be repeated. Cyprus must, in its future course, proceed without any grey areas with regard to its sovereignty or its relations with third-party States. If the people feel that their needs have not formed the basis of any solution that has been reached or that the characteristics of that solution have been dictated by the interests of third parties, then that solution will, unsurprisingly, be rejected. Indeed, in spirit and in practice, effective multilateralism not only encompasses but also derives from the comprehension and consideration of local realities and particulars, on which it must then proceed to formulate proposals.

In the framework of the European Union, and with the aim of promoting reunification and reconciliation, my Government — despite the obstacles created by the current status quo — is consistently pursuing policies aimed at enhancing the economic development of the Turkish Cypriots. We believe that such policies, while not intended to serve as a substitute for a solution, are the most effective way to foster maximum economic integration of the two communities and to increase contact between them, so as to ensure the viability of a future solution.

The Cyprus problem is not always perceived in its correct context. The fact remains that this problem is the result of a military invasion and of the continued occupation of part of the territory of a sovereign State. That fact should not be conveniently overlooked by concentrating on peripheral matters. Any initiative to solve the problem must have at its core that most basic and fundamental fact and must be based on the premise that international legality must be served and the occupation ended.

Unfortunately, the fundamentals of the situation on the ground have remained unchanged for the past 30 years, since the Turkish invasion in Cyprus. That situation comprises severe violations of the most fundamental human rights. The still-unresolved issue of missing persons — an issue of a purely humanitarian nature — and that of the enclaved of the Karpass peninsula are in themselves an indication of the enduring suffering of Cyprus. That not only should point us towards the specifics of the solution to be pursued, but also must guide our actions with regard to managing the status quo. For instance, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), assigned the task of managing the status quo inflicted 30 years ago, should remain specific to the situation on the ground.

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union, in conjunction with the lack of an agreement aimed at settling the Cyprus problem — despite our efforts and our preference for a settlement prior to accession — signifies the end of one era and the beginning of a new one.

I firmly believe that the new context defined by the accession of my country to the European Union and by the expressed will of Turkey to advance on the European path offers a unique opportunity and could have a catalytic effect in reaching a settlement in Cyprus. Our vocation is to be partners, not enemies.

Hence, in this new era, we call upon Turkey to join us in turning the page and in seeking ways to discover mutually beneficial solutions to the various aspects that compose the Cyprus problem. The mere realization that peace and stability in our region serve the interests of both our countries is ample evidence to prove that what unites us is stronger than what divides us.

The President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cyprus for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Festus Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana

The President *(spoke in French)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Botswana.

Mr. Festus Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Festus Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mogae: Let me start by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. Your election is a tribute not only to yourself, but also to your country, Gabon, with which Botswana enjoys the most cordial of relations. I assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation in the discharge of your onerous duties and responsibilities.

We also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte of Saint Lucia, for his stewardship of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Saint Lucia is another country with which Botswana enjoys excellent relations. Come to think of it, we can understand why countries of the world can be friendly with each other, as Botswana is friendly to them all.

Our words of congratulations are addressed also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his visionary leadership of the Organization and for his enduring spirit in the face of the complex challenges that the United Nations is called upon to address across our common universe.

I take this opportunity to join other delegations in extending our condolences to the Government and the people of the Russian Federation on the tragic loss of life in Beslan. There can never be any justification for such a savage attack on innocent children, men and women. Botswana joins the rest of the international community in condemning that horrendous act.

We also extend our sympathies and condolences to our dear brothers and sisters in the Caribbean and the southern part of the United States of America on the loss of life and the destruction of property caused by recent hurricanes.

We are gathered here today, 12 months before the first review of the Millennium Declaration, an unprecedented compact made by world leaders to unite in action in addressing the problems bedevilling humanity. It is our hope that we will use this gathering to reflect on whether we have done enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We have to ask ourselves, individually and collectively, whether the enthusiasm and political commitment with which we endorsed the Declaration is being translated into programmes and projects. Simply put, we must be ready to answer, hopefully in the affirmative, whether we are doing enough to meet the targets that we set for ourselves for the first five years of this millennium.

Let us recall that pessimists proclaimed the Millennium Summit a talking shop and poured scorn on its intended outcome. Are we doing enough to prove them wrong? We owe it to the millions of our people who look up to us to mitigate their suffering. Thus far, the available evidence suggests that our performance has been disappointing. Unfortunately, time is not on our side. There is need to act with vigour if we are to meet our commitments.

My delegation is fully aware that a multiplicity of factors combined to constrain and to thwart some of our efforts in the past few years. There is no doubt, for instance, that major international conflicts, such as the war in Iraq, have been a drag on the international community's efforts to focus on the Goals. As a result of the war, oil prices have skyrocketed, putting tremendous pressure on the world economy, and in particular on the vulnerable economies of developing countries.

In spite of those challenges, we have abiding faith in the human spirit, and therefore remain convinced that it is not beyond the capacity of the international community to implement those ideals.

The Millennium Declaration recognized that poverty eradication is fundamental to achieving sustainable development, but many of our people still live in conditions of abject poverty. The alleviation of poverty and its eventual eradication therefore remain a top priority for us. Official development assistance levels continue to fall in real terms to below the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product. I must, however, commend the few countries that have met that target. They have demonstrated that the target is realistic and achievable.

The continuing debt burden is contributing significantly to the failure to deal effectively with the problem of poverty. Most developing countries have undertaken courageous measures to implement painful structural reforms. The commendable steps taken to introduce sound macroeconomic management and principles of good governance deserve an urgent, positive and appropriate response. It must be acknowledged that some of the reforms can, in the short term, worsen the plight of the poor for a very long time before the benefits of the sacrifices are realized.

Structural reforms have not been confined to budgetary matters alone. They cover the whole economic spectrum, including the creation of an environment conducive to the growth of the private sector and development, as well as to the flow of foreign direct investment. A number of developing countries have promulgated legislative and regulatory frameworks to stimulate greater private sector participation in their economies. It is only natural, given the scope of the reform measures, that developing countries should expect some positive reaction in the form of flows of foreign direct investments, which at the moment are, regrettably, still very low.

In the area of trade, we are concerned about the slow progress in multilateral trade negotiations. As developing countries, we have more to gain from a more just, fairer and rule-based international trading system that would facilitate the integration of our economies into the global economy. We urge the major players in those negotiations to show a greater sense of urgency and commitment.

We are concerned at the fact that, in spite of the strong commitments expressed at the Millennium Summit, almost half of the people in sub-Saharan Africa continue to survive on a dollar a day. That reflects no change in the statistics of 1990. One hundred twenty-one million children are still out of school; and the under-5 mortality rate is still as high as 174 per 1,000 live births.

The resources provided to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic remain inadequate, yet we all agree that HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Combating the scourge of HIV/AIDS must therefore remain a high priority for action, because the epidemic has a debilitating impact on everything that we do to improve the human condition. In 2003, it was reported that about 40 million people around the world were living with the virus, and that well over 26 million of them were in sub-Saharan Africa alone. The epidemic has killed over 2.3 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, out of a total of 3 million people who died of AIDS-related illnesses around the world.

In Botswana, our various intervention programmes are beginning to bear fruit. We are indebted to our friends internationally, whose partnership, support, assistance and, indeed, solidarity have combined to save lives and give hope to many of our people. However, a lot still needs to be done. Our immediate challenge is the lack of capacity to provide the antiretroviral therapy programme to all who need assistance. We shall therefore continue to rely on the international community for consistent and assured support, if we are to assist our people in time.

International peace and security are under constant threat. Our collective memory appears to be failing to draw appropriate lessons, even from the recent horrors of conflicts in Rwanda, Afghanistan and the Balkans. Millions of people continue to suffer and die needlessly in Africa and elsewhere because of unnecessary conflicts. It is once again Africa that has had to bear the brunt of those conflicts.

We are concerned by the protracted conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire. As Africans, we accept our responsibility to find solutions to those conflicts. That is why we established the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in May of this year. In its short history, the Council has already deployed peacekeepers in Burundi and peace monitors in the Darfur region of Sudan, and has sent mediators and peace envoys to help in negotiating solutions to conflicts elsewhere on the continent.

One thing is clear: Africa is an integral part of the international community. The problems of Africa are global problems. We cannot isolate ourselves, nor be isolated from the rest of the world, and be expected to single-handedly find solutions to such conflicts. We need consistent and continued international support. In that regard, we acknowledge the important and commendable role that the United Nations is playing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Burundi.

The peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical stage. The international community has a duty and a responsibility to assist the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the search for national reconciliation and a lasting political settlement to the problems facing that country. It is our hope that the international community will provide the necessary financial and material support to ensure the success of the international conference on the Great Lakes region, which is to be held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, at the end of this year.

In Côte d'Ivoire, everything possible must be done to maintain peace and stability, as well as to promote national reconciliation, by ensuring that the parties accept the Government of National Reconciliation.

Regarding the situation in the Darfur region of Sudan, the international community must take urgent measures to arrest the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in that country. The people of Darfur should be assisted to return to their homes in safety and dignity. We urge the Government of Sudan to be receptive to the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report and, above all, take due cognizance of Security Council resolution 1564 (2004), and in particular to facilitate the speedy delivery by the international community of much-needed humanitarian assistance.

We are troubled by the escalating conflict in the Middle East, which is a serious threat to international peace and security. How long can humanity stand the sight of human suffering that we see daily on our television screens? For how long can generations of mothers mourn the loss of their sons in combat? For how long should succeeding generations fight wars that their forebears fought? We ask those involved in those conflicts, descendants of old civilizations that made enormous contributions to the growth and development of modern civilization, to live and let live and to find in themselves the courage to resolve their differences through dialogue rather than through indiscriminate violence.

Terrorism is one of the greatest challenges to international peace and security. No one country can defeat that scourge, which has caused the loss of many lives across the world. The activities of terrorists have become very complex and sophisticated. We need united, stronger and concerted action by all the countries of the world to defeat that scourge, which knows no boundaries.

In conclusion, I reaffirm the importance that Botswana attaches to the revitalization of the General Assembly and the reform of the Security Council. We commend the President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly for his practical proposals in that area. We were disappointed that the Assembly could not reach consensus on those proposals. My delegation will contribute in whatever small way it can to the building of such consensus.

Regarding the reform of the Security Council, we are concerned that, after 11 years of consultations, not much progress has been achieved. The solution to that vexing question rests on the ability of Member States, in particular the permanent members of the Council, to muster the political will to compromise. We should not tolerate this paralysis any longer. It is therefore my hope that action will be taken at this session to continue the process of democratizing the Security Council and make it more representative of the membership of the United Nations.

Finally, I once again make a special appeal to the general Membership of the Organization to do more to facilitate the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. We must do all we can to transform hope into reality. Together we have the resources, the skills and the science and technology to make the Declaration have meaning in the lives of our peoples. Botswana is committed to doing its part.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to thank the President of the Republic of Botswana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Festus G. Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Obasanjo: On behalf of the Government and people of Nigeria, and in my capacity as the current Chairman of the African Union (AU), I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I assure you of the support and cooperation of Africa, of which you are an illustrious son. I would also like to express appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency The Right Honourable Julian R. Hunte, Minister for External Affairs of Saint Lucia, for the dedication and skill with which he presided over the affairs of the fifty-eighth session. I commend Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his effective leadership and for his efforts to maintain the status of the United Nations in the face of enormous global challenges.

Nigeria remains unshakeable in its commitment to and support for the strengthening of the United Nations and the protection of its cherished ideals, in particular the maintenance of international peace and security and cooperation among States to resolve international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. The problem posed by the unremitting conflicts in various regions of the world and the increasingly difficult task of finding solutions to them continue to pose serious challenges to the world body.

Nigeria and the African Union (AU) commend the United Nations for its determined engagement in crisis resolution and peacekeeping, particularly in Africa. We have noted with appreciation the changes in the concept of peacekeeping. Nevertheless, we believe that some improvements are still necessary to enable United Nations peace operations to address the social and economic challenges that inevitably confront countries emerging from conflict. Those socio-economic issues invariably form an important part of the original causes of the conflict.

We also appeal for continued enhancement of the capacity of regional organizations to undertake initiatives on crisis resolution in their respective regions. For its part, the African Union has worked to improve its Mechanism for Conflict Resolution, and in May this year established a Peace and Security Council.

The first challenge the AU Peace and Security Council has faced has been the situation in the Darfur region of western Sudan, which aroused world attention because of the reported carnage there. On behalf of the AU, I want to thank the international community for the humanitarian intervention being undertaken. As is well known, the AU has deployed troops to the region to monitor a ceasefire between the Government of the Sudan and the opposing movements — the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement. Moreover, the first substantive peace talks took place under the auspices of the AU in the Nigerian capital of Abuja from 23 August to 18 September 2004. At that meeting, the Sudanese parties reached agreement on the first of the four points on the agenda, namely, humanitarian issues. They also made progress on the second point, security issues, before adjourning for consultations. A follow-up meeting is expected to be convened in Abuja around 21 October 2004 on the other issues: political and economic and social issues. I am closely following the developments, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union and others, and I now call upon the international community to continue to lend us its support in resolving the Darfur conflict and its consequences.

It is cheering to note the progress being made in Somalia, particularly in constituting the Parliament. The efforts of the regional countries, which are demonstrating unprecedented collaboration in helping the Somalis to move the process forward, should be applauded. The Somalis themselves must continue to demonstrate their commitment to repair past errors and to make their country a respectable member of the AU and the United Nations.

The Great Lakes region remains a flash point of violence, as exemplified by the recent massacre of more than 150 persons in a refugee camp in Burundi. On 25 June 2004, President Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and President Kagame of Rwanda met in Abuja at my invitation and agreed to activate the Joint Verification Mechanism. Thereafter, with the participation of the Secretary-General, a meeting of all stakeholders was held during the third African Union Summit, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 6 to 8 July 2004, in order to accelerate the activation of the Joint Verification Mechanism. I am hopeful that this renewed process will facilitate a better understanding of how to stem the spate of massacres and engender a peaceful resolution of the protracted crisis in the Great Lakes region.

With regard to the West African subregion, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are continuing their efforts, with the constant support of the United Nations, to ensure steady progress in the peace processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. To that end, and in order to address the standstill in the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement on Côte d'Ivoire, an extraordinary summit was held under ECOWAS auspices in Accra, Ghana, on 29 July 2004. The meeting benefited from the presence of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and some non-ECOWAS African heads of State. If the agreements reached at that summit are faithfully implemented, an end to the conflict should be in sight.

In the margins of the Accra summit, we also addressed problems that were retarding the implementation of the Liberian Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In discussions with all the Liberian leaders, we agreed decisions on the main issues, and we have since witnessed encouraging signs that those decisions are being implemented.

Here, I should like to remark once again that the delay in providing the resources promised by countries during the Liberian pledging conference held at United Nations Headquarters in February 2004 constitutes an avoidable hindrance to the advancement of peace in Liberia. I therefore call on all our well-meaning partners who were kind enough to make pledges to kindly redeem them.

While the United Nations is justifiably seized of the issue of weapons of mass destruction — such as nuclear, chemical and biological weapons — the question of small arms and light weapons can no longer be ignored. While the threat of weapons of mass destruction is awesome, small arms and light weapons are killing people every day at a rate that, cumulatively, amounts to monumental destruction. Nigeria and the African Union welcome the commencement of negotiations on a legally binding international instrument to enable States to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons globally. Of particular interest to Africa is the enormous potential that such a legally binding instrument can have on peace and security in our region. We should therefore not relent in our efforts.

Let me take this opportunity to soundly condemn the totally unacceptable role of mercenaries and their sponsors in Africa. The recent attempted invasion of Equatorial Guinea and other such attempts go against every imaginable rational effort at promoting stability and democracy on the continent. We call on the United Nations to join the African Union in sending the right signals of condemnation to those mercenaries and their sponsors.

Our quest for global peace and security will prove unsuccessful unless we intensify international cooperation for development and the reduction of poverty. Just four years ago, we adopted the Millennium Development Goals, which pointedly fixed the target of reducing by half the number of those living in poverty by 2015. Yet by now, the alarm is being raised that, if present trends continue, that target may not be met, particularly in Africa, which aside from the challenges of development, is also being ravaged by pandemic diseases.

Speaking on behalf of the African Union as its current Chairperson, I should like to assure the General Assembly that we Africans are determined to exert all our efforts to overcome those obstacles to development that are within our control. To that end, we are pursuing, with the personal commitment and involvement of our heads of State and Government themselves, the implementation of the priorities set out in our flagship programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

In that context, we appreciate the conclusion in the Secretary-General's second consolidated report on progress in implementation and international support for NEPAD that

> "African countries have demonstrated their commitment to advancing the implementation of NEPAD by earmarking financial allocations to selected sectoral priorities." (*A/59/206, para. 67*)

The report also concludes that

> "The development partners of Africa can give further practical expression to their support for the efforts of African countries by taking action in three important areas: first, by creating an enabling international environment that is supportive of growth and development in Africa; second, by bringing much needed coherence to trade, aid and debt policies, so that African countries are the net beneficiaries of international actions in those areas; and third, by undertaking concrete measures to accelerate the implementation of NEPAD by making significant financial outlays to fund the key sectoral priorities of NEPAD." (*ibid., para. 68*)

I believe that the message to our development partners is very clear. To demonstrate our commitment to the principles of good governance, transparency and the rule of law, 23 African countries have already subscribed to the African Peer Review Mechanism. It should be recalled that the Mechanism represents

Africa's voluntary commitment to a set of performance codes and standards to foster best practices and share lessons in the management of national affairs. The promotion of agriculture is being vigorously pursued both for its export potential and for poverty alleviation. Encouraging growth rates in agricultural production are already being recorded in several African countries. Simultaneously, we are intensifying our efforts in the promotion of agro-based industries.

To further our efforts at self-help, the heads of State and Government of the African Union held the Extraordinary Summit on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 5 to 9 September 2004. We adopted a far-reaching declaration and programme of action. We also adopted mechanisms for implementation and monitoring at the national, regional and continental levels.

What may act as an obstacle to implementation in this most important area for lifting the African population out of poverty and misery is the inevitable issue of having adequate resources for meeting our otherwise realistic goals. On behalf of the African Union, I appeal to our partners to act once again in the interest of our shared, common global interdependence and common humanity.

Africa requires a genuine partnership anchored on the principle of mutual benefits to ensure the attainment of sustainable development. One area of partnership concerns Africa's external debts. The negative impact of debt on the economic situation of African countries, particularly the least developed countries, can no longer be denied. We remain convinced that comprehensively resolving the lingering debt crisis through innovative action would brighten the prospects of development in Africa.

Africa welcomes the consensus that emerged from the recent meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in São Paulo, Brazil. That consensus reflects a shared conviction that the Organization can continue to coordinate our views on trade and development matters. This cannot be otherwise if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved and the benefits of expanding trade are to be enjoyed by all peoples and societies.

By launching a new initiative to commence a new round of multilateral trade negotiations, developing countries have issued a challenge to our development partners to exploit global opportunities for growth and development. We hope they will respond.

Africa remains committed to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, tuberculosis and related diseases. Since the last series of high-level plenary meetings on implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, we have taken bold steps to deal with the pandemic. Towards that end, we in Nigeria have established a national scientific institute for research on HIV/AIDS and intensified public awareness programmes. In that connection, we welcome the outcome of the recent International Conference on HIV/AIDS in Bangkok, Thailand. We thank the United Nations agencies and all stakeholders for their collective efforts to stem the spread of the disease worldwide.

With regard to other deadly preventable diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, polio and whooping cough, my Government has stepped up its efforts. In a few days, on 2 October 2004, my Government will once again embark on a polio immunization programme, in coordination with six African States — Chad, the Sudan, Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire — to ensure maximum effectiveness. These are countries where polio has been reported fairly recently. Significantly and symbolically, the programme's launch, with all my brothers and colleagues present, will take place in Kano.

Last year, the Secretary-General launched a United Nations reform initiative that we all warmly commended. In pursuit of that initiative, the Secretary-General appointed last year a high-level Panel of Eminent Personalities to examine ways of strengthening the United Nations through institutional reforms and processes. We are looking forward to the report of the Panel. Nigeria — and indeed the rest of Africa — holds the view that the Security Council should be expanded in its permanent and non-permanent categories to make it more representative, more effective and more acceptable. We hope that those regions of the world that are not currently represented in the permanent membership category will be given membership. Africa, whose issues occupy a substantial part of the Security Council's time, ought to be accorded priority consideration for permanent membership, and Nigeria, I strongly believe, is a well-qualified candidate.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of India.

Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in French*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Singh (India): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. May I assure you of India's full support in ensuring its success.

As we gather here in the sixtieth year since the United Nations was founded, we might perhaps pause to reflect on the fate of the ideas and ideals of the international community that inspired its creation. The post-war generation had already become aware that the world which had emerged from the ashes of a global war could no longer be a peaceful world unless the underlying forces of conflict were addressed effectively by the entire community of nations as a collectivity. Nations were therefore united to make the world a safer and more peaceful place — a world in which free peoples could pursue together a destiny of shared prosperity.

The impulse behind the creation of global institutions nearly 60 years ago has become an even more pressing reality today. If we look around us, the single most defining characteristic of our contemporary world is the global, transnational character of the challenges we confront, whether these are in the realm of international security or in that of development. Virtually every major issue that we face as nation-States has both a domestic and a transnational dimension. It is becoming increasingly apparent as never before that, unless we fashion a global response to those challenges based on a meaningful consensus, we will not succeed in creating a world that truly manifests the ideals of the United Nations.

Terrorism is one such challenge for which many of us have paid an unacceptable price. We shall not forget that, three years ago, it was this great city that witnessed the single most horrendous terrorist act in human history. Approximately three weeks ago, in Russia, the world saw another brutal act of terror which took the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, including a large number of young children.

Terrorism exploits the technologies spawned by globalization, recruits its foot soldiers on ideologies of bigotry and hatred, and directly targets democracies. And yet, it is a sad reality that international networks of terror appear to cooperate more effectively among themselves than the democratic nations that they target. We speak about cooperation, but we often seem hesitant to commit ourselves to a truly global offensive to root out terrorism with the pooling of resources, the exchanging of information, the sharing of intelligence and the unambiguous unity of purpose that is required. That must change. We do have a global coalition against terrorism; we must now give it substance and credibility, avoiding selective approaches and political expediency.

I now turn to other challenges that we face today, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There is an increasing reliance on restrictive regimes and on the use of punitive action to confront this threat to international peace and security. Although India is firmly opposed to proliferation and has an impeccable record in that respect, we believe that it is only a global consensus of willing nations that will ultimately prove to be truly effective in that regard.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a good model to follow with respect to other weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. It is through representative institutions, rather than through exclusive clubs of privileged countries, that we can address global threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. As far back as 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi outlined a series of specific steps in an action plan, whose central proposition remains valid even today — that progressive steps towards the elimination of weapons of mass destruction must be based on a balance of obligations between those who possess such weapons and those who do not.

It is quite evident today that a global discourse is required for evolving a more cooperative and consensual international security order. India believes that such consensus must differentiate between States whose actions strengthen non-proliferation and those that weaken the realization of its objectives.

Let me now turn to the central theme for the vast majority of United Nations Members: the challenge of development and the eradication of mass poverty. Globalization has undoubtedly brought enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in the functioning of our economies. It has integrated marketplaces, higher standards of living and a revolution in global connectivity.

But there is also the phenomenon of widening economic disparities, both within and among countries. Connectivity also means that the people are painfully aware — in real time — of how far and how fast they are falling behind in their relative living conditions. Development today is no longer a function of domestic resources and national policies alone. It is a process that is vitally linked to the international economic environment that the developing countries face.

The international community must find ways to contract those circles of exclusion. We need to find innovative sources of financing and access to new technologies that are necessary to assist those who are on the margins of globalization. Just as prosperity cannot be sustained by being walled in, poverty cannot be banished to some invisible periphery. Development must therefore return to the centre of the global discourse. We must evolve equitable and rule-based regimes to manage global trade, investment flows and the movement of services.

Four years ago, at our Millennium Summit, we adopted ambitious global development goals, but it is a matter of concern that we have already fallen behind in their implementation.

While globalization has generated new challenges, it has also given us new technologies to deal with those massive challenges. The world faces ominous pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, but it today also possesses remedies and skills that can rid the world of that scourge. We face problems of environmental degradation in many parts of our planet, but we also have available safe and environment-friendly technologies.

Many countries are beset by problems of hunger and malnutrition, but we possess modern techniques of food production and processing to make a hunger-free world a credible and realistic dream. Although our excessive dependence on hydrocarbons raises concerns about the long-term availability of energy and about the security of supplies, technology has made available many environmentally sound alternative technologies. What we lack, however, is a truly global agreement and a mobilization of the international community to overcome the massive challenges.

The experience of the decades since the inception of the United Nations demonstrates the great significance of democracy as an instrument for achieving both peace and prosperity. While it is gratifying that the frontiers of democracy have expanded dramatically in the last decade and a half, they still exclude significant numbers.

Only a few months ago, in India's fourteenth general election, our country went through the largest exercise of popular will in the world. I can therefore assert with confidence, the importance that national articulations in global forums have in truly reflecting the democratically expressed will of their people. We choose to overlook the absence of democracy in too many cases for reasons of political expediency.

Democracy's representative nature validates the commitments we take on as countries; it should also determine the manner in which the architecture of international institutions evolves. What is required for the international community to successfully deal with global challenges — whether they be security challenges, economic challenges or challenges in the sphere of the environment — is the existence of international institutions and a culture of genuine multilateralism.

The United Nations and its specialized agencies are the only instruments available for responding effectively to the challenges we face collectively. But what is missing is our sustained commitment to democratizing the functioning of the United Nations.

It is common knowledge that the United Nations is often unable to exert an effective influence on global economic and political issues of critical importance.

That is due to what may be called its democracy deficit, which stands in the way of an effective multilateralism based on a democratically-evolved global consensus.

Therefore, reform and restructuring of the United Nations system can alone provide a crucial link in an expanding chain of efforts to refashion international structures, imbuing them with a greater degree of participatory decision-making so as to make them more representative of contemporary realities.

Our Millennium Declaration recognized the urgency of the reform of the United Nations Security Council. An overwhelming majority of the world's population cannot be excluded from an institution that today legislates on an increasing number of issues, with an ever-widening impact. The expansion of the Security Council, in the categories of both permanent and non-permanent members, and the inclusion of countries like India as permanent Members would be a first step in the process of making the United Nations a truly representative body.

I would like to make brief references to two countries with which India has had historically friendly ties and whose early return to political normalcy is the focus of the world's attention.

The situation in Iraq causes us great concern. The United Nations has a central role to play in erasing the discord of the recent past and in ensuring that the Iraqi people can soon exercise effective sovereignty, preserving the country's unity and territorial integrity. An end to the suffering of the Iraqi people and recognition of their aspirations should be the guiding objectives. Consistent with our longstanding ties of friendship with the Iraqi people, India will contribute to Iraq's humanitarian and economic reconstruction.

In the past three years, the international community has assisted Afghanistan in pulling back from the brink of chaos and chronic instability. We sincerely hope that the upcoming presidential elections and the subsequent parliamentary elections will allow the Afghan people to express their will, free from interference and intimidation. India's assistance to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development will continue.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been a matter of attention for the international community. It is known that in January this year India and Pakistan initiated a composite dialogue to resolve all issues, including that of Jammu and Kashmir. I reaffirm our determination to carry forward that dialogue to a purposeful and mutually acceptable conclusion.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm India's commitment to the principles that have brought us together in this Organization. Those principles retain their relevance and validity even while the global economy and the international political order pose new and very different challenges. All of us have to grow out of the comfort of the predictable, discard constraining habits of thought, and move forward with confidence to meet the demands of the present and the future. Each of us has to be prepared to take on new obligations and larger responsibilities relevant to the needs of our time.

I deem it a privilege to say unhesitatingly that India is conscious of the responsibilities that lie ahead. I speak of an India on the move — on the cutting edge of economic, technological and developmental transformations. This is an India endowed with outstanding human resources, and we are putting in place policies which will respond to emerging and critical tasks. We have the capabilities and capacity to take these on, and to participate in the restructuring of a just and dynamic world order. We are confident that, in the inextricably interdependent world we live in, our commitment to the common good, which this Organization embodies, will be resolute and full.

In this, we are inspired by the vision of internationalism bequeathed to us by India's first Prime Minister, the great Jawaharlal Nehru — a vision of a world order whose pillars are peace, harmony, cooperation and development. That vision needs to reanimate the collective wisdom of the world community for a new partnership to meet the unprecedented challenges we face.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of India for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Joschka Fischer, Deputy Federal Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Mr. Fischer (Germany) *(spoke in German; English text provided by the delegation)*: Let me first of all congratulate you, President Ping, on your election and wish you every success in your responsible post, and express my sincere thanks to the outgoing President for his dedicated work.

I endorse the statement of the Netherlands European Union presidency.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the world is changing at dramatic speed. In just a few decades, humanity will have reached the 8 billion mark. With the networking of world trade and with global communication technologies, we are growing ever closer. We are going to become increasingly interdependent in economic, technical and ecological terms.

At the same time, we all face a host of new challenges and new dangers which threaten us all — the South and the North, the developing and the developed world alike.

On the one hand, there are threats to national and global security such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the nuclear threat, the danger posed by failed States or, as we all painfully remember in this city, by terrorism, which does not respect humankind or human dignity.

On the other hand, there are also so-called soft threats, such as far-reaching environmental and climatic changes, poverty, major shortfalls in education and training and the negative aspects of globalization, refugee flows, and diseases and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. They are a threat to security and stability and take a heavy toll.

The two — hard and soft threats — are closely connected. After all, we know that the causes of war and violence, poverty, need and oppression are multifaceted and deep-rooted. We also know that crises are the fruit of poverty and a sense of hopelessness, and vice-versa. We will have no peace without development, nor indeed development without peace, so we have comprehensively to secure peace and stability — above all through economic and social development.

The States of the world have to work together to shape economic, technological and ecological globalization and rise to the resulting challenges. They will not be able to do so without close cooperation. Indeed, that is now beyond the tools of traditional diplomacy alone. Their ability to secure and stabilize the international system on their own will in future prove less and less adequate.

What we need is a far-reaching reform of the international system and its institutions that takes due account of these changes. That is a reform we need urgently, because we have to create an effective multilateral system which enables us to work together to prevent crises and, where that does not work, find long-term solutions.

There have already been promising developments at the regional level. With their sometimes painful history very much in mind, the States of Europe have joined together in the European Union and thus have reached a new level of multilateralism. This political and economic community, now embracing 25 States, has become an anchor of stability for Europe and beyond.

Since its foundation the African Union has been impressively shouldering its shared responsibility for preventing humanitarian disasters and resolving major regional conflicts. This is a courageous and key step forward. This breakthrough of multilateralism on the African continent will develop an ever more pronounced dynamism.

Given global interdependencies and connections, we need a world organization that has close links to these regional structures and can thus boost the efficiency of joint action. The United Nations is the most important forum for setting global rules. Its might is the might of the right, as the Secretary-General highlighted in his impressive speech at the opening of this General Assembly session. With its legitimacy we have a unique and universal competence for solving problems together. Since the breaking of the internal blockade caused by the cold war, the United Nations has been playing an increasingly significant role. The international community is making more and more use of it as a forum for tackling the major challenges facing humanity.

For millions of people today the Blue Flag means quite tangible help, often on essential issues, and hope for a better future. For this, we are all very much indebted to the Organization and its staff. They are on the ground in many crisis regions in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

It is becoming ever clearer that different approaches must be found to prevent or resolve each individual crisis. The commitment of the United Nations in all crisis areas is the proof. In Afghanistan and in the Balkans, in Haiti and in the Great Lakes region the United Nations is already making a considerable contribution. But we must realize that there will not be fewer conflicts in the future, and the demands made of the Organization will grow.

Against this backdrop the question arises whether the structures given to the United Nations at its foundation almost sixty years ago are still suited to this mandate, whether its work enjoys the international acceptance it needs. In particular, the disputes concerning the Iraq crisis highlighted this problem once again.

We are convinced there is no alternative to a world acting multilaterally. To make this multilateral cooperation sustainable and capable, we need a courageous and comprehensive reform of the United Nations that faces up to the challenges we are facing.

It was the Secretary-General himself who took the initiative, and for this we extend our thanks. To that end, he appointed a panel of high-level international experts who are to present him with reform proposals at the end of the year. We look forward to that report and the ensuing debate with great interest.

What is at stake is a new, shared understanding of the Charter system. How can we shape prevention to make it more effective, and peace-building to make it more sustainable? How can we further implement the proposals on the reform of peacekeeping? What exactly do we understand by the right of self-defence? How do we define terrorism? The answer to this question in particular seems clear, yet real agreement would take us, the international community of States, a step forward.

A number of very concrete proposals on the reform of the United Nations institutions have already been presented. Let me therefore outline some thoughts on this matter.

I want to start with the General Assembly. It is the central organ of the United Nations, the only one with universal membership. For this very reason, the Assembly has to be more than an annual forum where we just go through the motions. What we need to do first is focus our topics more carefully. We have to discuss the truly crucial issues — otherwise, essential questions will be dealt with in other forums. Secondly, we need more efficient working methods.

The Economic and Social Council has to finally become the central organ in the United Nations system for consultation and decision-making on economic and social issues. We believe that the Council has at two levels vast potential that has yet to be fully tapped. On the one hand, that body maintains a network of expertise unequalled in the world. We have to make better and more targeted use of it. On the other hand, we see the Economic and Social Council as a partner for the Security Council for peacekeeping, as laid down in Article 65 of the Charter. When it comes to fighting the causes of conflicts and to post-crisis rehabilitation, the Economic and Social Council has an important role to play that can support Security Council efforts for conflict prevention and peace-building. We should grant the Economic and Social Council more competences in the operative sphere.

After all, the efforts we make in peace missions will be successful only if the military commitment is followed by a longer phase of stabilization, and very often that phase turns out to be the most difficult one. The Economic and Social Council advisory groups on post-crisis rehabilitation in Africa are a step in the right direction. That is what the decisive link between conflict management and development cooperation could indeed look like.

Such an all-embracing approach needs appropriate financial resources. The instrument of voluntary contributions has proven insufficient in everyday life, and therefore I propose earmarking a certain share of the United Nations peacekeeping budget for post-crisis rehabilitation. This means we could achieve what we have long been trying, a “prevention share”, which — let us remember Haiti — could help us save the costs of conflicts flaring up again.

Many criticize the proliferation of subsidiary and subordinate organizations of the United Nations. Of course, a reduction cannot be an end in itself. But we ought to exercise enough self-criticism to ask ourselves whether it would not be better to pool competences in some cases.

However, there are also spheres that need to be better equipped. I am thinking here, for example, of the handling of environmental issues in the United Nations system. We thus support the proposal made by French President Jacques Chirac last year to upgrade the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to a specialized agency with universal membership. That could considerably strengthen UNEP's contribution to sustainable development.

At the heart of the reform of the United Nations is the organ shouldering the central responsibility for international peace: the Security Council. Conflicts are on the increase. They stretch across all continents, and they are growing in complexity. In turn, the responsibility and competences of the Council have expanded constantly. Crisis prevention will play an increasingly important role. And for peace-building, ever more comprehensive strategies, closer cooperation and additional resources will be needed. This will mean more and more decisions that entail long-term obligations, create new international law and make major inroads into State sovereignty.

If we really want Security Council decisions to be accepted as legitimate and implemented effectively, we have to reform the Council. It has to more broadly represent a world organization that today embraces more than 191 countries. That is inconceivable without increasing the number of seats — for permanent and non-permanent members alike. The reasons behind such a move speak for themselves.

A Council with more members would enjoy greater acceptance internationally as a basis for greater authority. The more balanced and comprehensive representation of all continents — also among the permanent members — would lead to a better sense of ownership of the Security Council for all States. Similarly, an enlargement would considerably bolster the motivation of the new Council members to make a long-term contribution to realizing the goals of the United Nations.

The enlargement must adequately reflect sea changes such as decolonization, the end of the cold war and globalization. The composition of the Council must ultimately mirror the current geopolitical reality. That means that all major regions of the South must be represented by permanent members in the Security Council. At the same time, account has to be taken of Members that can and want to make a particularly meaningful and sustainable contribution to maintaining world peace and international security and to realizing the purposes of the Organization. That twofold approach would increase the Council's efficiency and its ability to act and to assert itself.

For 40 years, the composition of the Security Council has remained unchanged. I believe it is high time to adapt it to the new global reality. Half-baked or interim solutions are neither necessary nor helpful. Like Brazil, India and Japan, Germany too is ready to take on the responsibility associated with a permanent seat in the security Council. But it is especially important to us that the African continent be represented among the new permanent members.

A second aspect also has to be taken into account in Security Council reform. All in all, a greater number of Member States that are engaging themselves in the work of the United Nations should be able to get more involved in the work of the Security Council. For that to happen, additional non-permanent seats also have to be created. That would mean that the balance between permanent and non-permanent members could be retained.

As I said before, United Nations reform will be the central and defining theme of this General Assembly session. I thus call upon Member States: let us use the fifty-ninth session, right up until the next session in 2005, to launch the overdue reforms and achieve tangible results. We, the Member States, have to muster the political insight, the will and the creativity to adapt the Organization to the global reality. Germany is ready to make a committed contribution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Silvan Shalom, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel.

Mr. Shalom (Israel): I would like to congratulate you, Sir, the Foreign Minister of Gabon, upon your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly and to wish you much success.

The United Nations was established out of the devastation of the Second World War in order to build a world of unity and of peace. Today, 60 years after the Organization came into being, we must ask ourselves: What are we united for and what are we united against? Are we united for peace and security? Are we united for fairness and justice? Are we united against terror? Are we united against tyranny?

Or are we, sadly, united only in cynical and immoral majority votes that make a mockery of the noble ideals on which this body was founded? Tomorrow is Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, when all Jews stand before God to account for their actions. It is an appropriate time for all nations, separately and together, to engage in such an accounting.

I sense a change in the world. In the face of the global campaign of terror which has left no country free of its devastating impact, the world is beginning to realize what we in Israel have long known: that terrorism is a challenge to humanity as a whole, not just to individual countries; that the response to that global threat must also be global if it is to be effective; that the threat of terrorism anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere; that fighting terror is crucial to our ability to bring peace.

There was a time when the problems of terror, Islamic fundamentalism and Iranian nuclear ambition were seen as local problems — Israel's problems — not challenges which threatened the community of nations as a whole. Today, however, our community of nations is more united than ever in the battle against terrorism, whose sole objective is to undermine everything that we seek to build: peace, stability, prosperity and opportunity for all.

Today we are also more united than ever in opposition to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The international community now realizes that Iran — with missiles that can reach London, Paris, Berlin and southern Russia — poses a threat not only to the security of Israel, but to the security and stability of the whole world. Indeed, Iran has replaced Saddam Hussein as the world's number-one exporter of terror, hate and instability.

The international community now also realizes, as reflected in Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), that Syria's occupation of Lebanon and its support for Palestinian terror must end if our collective aspirations are to be fulfilled.

And the international community now realizes that terror and tyranny are the twin enemies of the individual freedoms and human rights — including the right to life itself — which define our humanity.

Today, the community of nations knows that securing freedom and democracy for all the peoples of the world must be our collective goal. The pictures of human flesh torn apart by the terrorists, from New York to Beslan — and just yesterday, once again, in Jerusalem — are waking us up to the challenge we face.

In that spirit of unity, and in the name of all those in the world who suffer from terror and tyranny, I call on the Assembly to refocus its aspirations and its priorities. I call on the Assembly to end its obsession with Israel and to ensure that United Nations resources are allocated more equally and more effectively. Our United Nations must provide solutions to the global challenges of hunger and poverty, of disease and weapons proliferation, of drug trafficking and sustainable development. We must not let the Palestinian desire to vilify Israel distract our global community from the obligation to address the needs of all peoples.

I call on the Assembly to address head-on the active involvement of Iran and Syria in terrorism and Syria's continued occupation of Lebanon. There can be no place in the community of nations for those who promote the killing of children. I call on the Assembly to promote practical measures to help nations cut off all financial and political lifelines of terror.

I call on the Assembly to address the growth of anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and intolerance. I urge you, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General, to convene a special session of the Assembly on that crucial matter. We all share the responsibility to educate our children to understanding and tolerance rather than to hatred and incitement.

We must build a united and global coalition to fight terrorism, racism and anti-Semitism. We must build a united front against the cold-blooded murderers of our children. In that battle, there is no middle ground. There is no room for explanations or excuses. There are no mitigating circumstances. Declarations and condemnations are very important, but they are not enough. Every nation, every Government, every leader has the responsibility to act. Those who choose instead to support and sponsor terror must be isolated and held to account for their crimes.

When I speak of terror and its dangers to life and freedom, I speak from bitter personal experience. My own home town of Beersheva suffered a double suicide bombing just three weeks ago. Sixteen innocent people were killed when their commuter buses were blown up. In the middle of an important meeting with visiting officials, I rushed to call my mother and brother to check that they were alive. Hamas, which operates freely from Palestinian territory and receives support and safe haven from the regimes in Damascus and Tehran, proudly claimed responsibility for that horrific attack.

Again yesterday, as I was meeting with the Secretary-General to discuss peace in the Middle East, I was passed a note informing me of a suicide atrocity, in which two more Israelis were blown to pieces by a Palestinian terrorist. And this morning, once again, yet more Palestinian murderers took the lives of three young Israelis in an attack on Morag.

In the last year alone, 150 Israelis have been killed and thousands more injured in more than 40 separate suicide bombings and other cold-blooded attacks. More than 200 additional suicide-bombing attempts were blocked by our defensive measures.

No Israeli mother is free of the fear that her child may be lost. No Israeli child is immune to the terrorists' plans. In the name of God above and all humanity here on Earth, this killing must stop.

Palestinian terrorism is the key reason that the dream of peace in the Middle East has not yet become a reality. Combating this terror is crucial to the prospects for peace in our region. No peace initiative can survive if terrorists continue to enjoy a free hand to undermine it.

The road map recognizes this, calling, in phase one, for sustained Palestinian action against terror, the dismantling of terrorist organizations and the end of incitement in schools and the media. Sadly, the current Palestinian leadership has refused to fulfil those fundamental obligations, preferring to blame Israel for all its failures. The Palestinian side spends more energy fighting Israel here at the United Nations than it does fighting the terrorists in its own territory.

In the post-11-September world, this is not acceptable. The Palestinians are not exempt from the imperatives of the global war on terror. On the contrary, it is in their clear interest to join it. To stand up against Hamas and Islamic Jihad is to stand up for Palestinian rights, not against them.

We urge the international community to recognize this reality and help the voices of reform and moderation within Palestinian society to emerge. The future of the Palestinian people will be determined by the choices that the Palestinians and their leadership make on the ground. The solutions — for the Palestinians and Israelis as one — lie in Gaza and Ramallah, not in The Hague or New York.

Israel is acting in both the diplomatic and the security arenas to deal with the consequences of this chronic failure of the Palestinian leadership. On the diplomatic front, Israel accepted the road map in May 2003, and we remain committed to its realization. At this time, however, we have no responsible Palestinian partner ready to join us in this effort. Israel is now planning to implement the disengagement plan as a means of enhancing security and establishing a new, more promising platform for a return to negotiations. We are in constant contact with the donor community and the World Bank in a joint effort to rebuild Gaza in the wake of Israel's withdrawal.

On the security front, Israel is building a security fence to stop the unchecked wave of Palestinian attacks. After 20,000 terrorist attacks, we deserve to protect our people. No other country would act otherwise after 20, let alone 20,000, terrorist attacks. The fence does not take lives. It saves them. Where there is a fence, there is no terror. Where there is no fence, there is terror. The modified route of the fence reflects the necessary balance between the security of our citizens and the welfare of the Palestinian population, as called for by Israel's Supreme Court. Most important, the fence is reversible. The lives taken by terror are irreversible. By helping take terrorism out of the equation, the fence contributes to the prospect of a return to negotiations and the realization of the road map's vision of peace.

I call on the Assembly to acknowledge this truth and to reject the continued Palestinian effort to have delegations address Israel's response to terrorism, instead of addressing the terrorism itself.

Ultimately, we need real contact and dialogue, based on mutual respect for the humanity of the other if we are to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. The Government of Israel is ready for such contact. We are ready to talk to any leadership — from Syria, Lebanon or the Palestinians — that comes to the table without terror and with the genuine intention of finding mutually acceptable solutions to our differences.

Tomorrow, Yom Kippur, is a day of prayer, fasting and soul-searching for the Jews. In Beersheva, in a synagogue named after my father, I will be praying together with those who have recently buried their murdered children. I will pray that our collective aspiration for life and freedom will prevail over the terrorists and those who sponsor them. I will pray that God will deliver peace on earth, for all humanity. And I will pray that mankind can unite — through the

United Nations — to help make this dream become a reality.

And I would like to say in Hebrew, Happy New Year.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Albert Shabangu, Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland.

Mr. Shabangu (Swaziland): Allow me to convey to all members of the United Nations family the warm greetings and best wishes of His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, the Government and, indeed, the entire Swazi nation.

The Kingdom of Swaziland congratulates you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this session. We are especially proud that a fellow African has been elected to that demanding position, and we are confident that your diplomatic skill and experience will help you to lead the Assembly towards a successful conclusion of its deliberations.

In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, the world is understandably preoccupied with the question of security and the war on terror. The Kingdom of Swaziland continues to condemn, in no uncertain terms, terrorism which constantly threatens world peace, security and stability. As part of our support for the alliance against terrorism, the Government of Swaziland is currently studying the United Nations conventions that deal with terrorism, to ensure not only the adaptation of such important conventions, but also compliance with them. The Parliament of the Kingdom of Swaziland will be debating, and will hopefully pass, its long-awaited anti-terrorism bill during its next session.

Future world stability is also threatened by the continuing spread of weapons of mass destruction. Our failure as an Organization in that regard thus far is due to inability to agree on a time frame suitable to all Members for arms control and nuclear disarmament.

The Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) were designed as an essential first step towards a world free from the danger that such weapons pose. We clearly need to find a way to strengthen the non-proliferation regime and to prevent the flow of conventional weapons and anti-personnel landmines into zones of conflicts or into the hands of terrorists. The Kingdom of Swaziland therefore calls upon the Conference on Disarmament to implement the proposal of the Non-Aligned Movement by establishing, as its highest priority, an ad hoc committee to begin negotiations on a programme for the complete and time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons from those countries that have them.

While the possibility of global conflict has diminished since the end of the cold war era, it is a fact that there has been a corresponding increase in the incidence of internal conflicts and cross-border disturbances, arising from a variety of causes, including ethnic and religious confrontation.

The situation in the Middle East is inevitably at the centre of the debate on peace and security. The Kingdom of Swaziland pledges the continuation of our support for all initiatives and efforts aimed at resolving that situation and at bringing peace and stability to the Middle East. We sincerely believe that the vital role of the United Nations continues to be critical to the resolution of the Middle East conflict.

The creation of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the great strides that have been taken in the past two years, are a clear indication that we are moving in the right direction. We are convinced that, with the support of the international community and in the spirit of the true partnership that is demonstrated by mutual respect, we shall succeed in our objectives, initiatives and efforts to raise the living standards of our peoples.

We have placed our trust in NEPAD to be the vehicle for that shift away from the underdevelopment and conflict of the past by addressing the fundamental root causes of our problems. The ongoing integration of our initiatives and programmes within the African continent will make possible sustainability and true growth in our economies. Together, in unity of purpose, we shall succeed. In that regard, we welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of the Advisory Panel on International Support for NEPAD, which will, in our view, help us to be more effective in our efforts to promote Africa's development.

Our united effort is also addressing the conflicts that continue to threaten peace, stability and security on the African continent. We realize that, without those elements, our development goals will continue to elude us, especially because, apart from resources that are wasted on arms, our people can be productive and be able to trade among themselves and with the rest of the world only under conditions of peace, stability and security.

The establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union is a landmark event in our efforts to manage our conflicts. In particular, allow me to single out for commendation Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his tireless efforts to highlight and address African problems. We look forward to the complete resolution of the dispute in Somalia, and in particular to the resolution of the dispute in the Darfur region of the Sudan.

The complex challenges facing the world today lend greater significance and urgency to initiatives for the reform of our Organization. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that those reforms are essential if the United Nations is to retain the global credibility and authority that are so necessary to its operations. Our aim must be to transform the Organization into a structure that is truly representative of all Members and that is transparent and efficient in its operations, while remaining consistent with the purposes and objectives of our founding Charter. We believe that achieving balanced representation in the principal organs of the United Nations should be a priority.

In that regard, we support an increase in both permanent and non-permanent seats in the Security Council. The Security Council in particular requires reform in order to strengthen its legitimacy. Its composition must reflect the plurality and diversity of the membership of the United Nations, to recognize the profound geopolitical changes that have taken place in recent history. However, due to a lack of political will on the part of some Members to increase the membership of the Security Council, progress in the reform agenda remains unattainable.

Turning now to the question of development, we believe that the Millennium Declaration marked a turning point in carrying out the mission unanimously entrusted to the United Nations in the area of sustainable development. Indeed, for the first time, heads of State or Government agreed on specific goals and targets in the social, economic and educational fields, up to the year 2015. In our view, the leaders were correct to make the related topics of peace, security, development and poverty eradication priorities to be addressed, because future world stability depends on the ability of national Governments to increase the momentum for economic development and their capacity to improve the delivery of job creation and essential services such as health and education.

Developing countries have been facing special difficulties in responding to the challenges brought about by globalization. As a result, many developing countries, especially the least developed ones, have remained marginalized in the globalizing world economy. Consequently, the benefits of globalization are unevenly distributed. In that regard, the Kingdom of Swaziland believes that in order to maximize the benefits of globalization, the process of integration into the world economy should take into account the level of economic development of each country and the capacity of its institutions and enterprises. In particular, specific national development potentials and socio-economic circumstances, as well as differing initial conditions relating to size, resource endowments, economic structure and location, should be considered. It is also necessary to take into account the specific development, financial and trade needs of developing countries, in view of the fact that there can be no one-size-fits-all trade development strategy.

I believe that I speak on behalf of many from the developing world when I say that small economies are not receiving fair treatment in global trade. The proposed removal of preferential terms for our agricultural products and the continuation of subsidies for such products from the developed world is bound to deal a fatal blow to many of our weak economies. We request understanding and appreciation of our situation by our developed partners. We are asking for a partnership that will take into account our unique situations as developing economies so that we can participate effectively in the global market. For our part, as small economies, we pledge quality and high standards for our products. Our farmers are more than ready to deliver the best to international markets. It should be noted that agricultural incomes are the cornerstone of development for our rural communities.

For our part in the Kingdom of Swaziland, poverty alleviation remains the number-one priority. Sixty-six per cent of our people are living below the internationally recognized poverty line, yet our classification as a lower-middle-income country prevents our access to many of the funds and resources that are available to those in different categories. We will be working with the United Nations to ensure that this situation is corrected.

In the meantime, we are focusing our efforts and available resources on programmes that meet the challenges of poverty in a sustainable and equitable manner. Our national development strategy, which is the result of direct consultation with all stakeholders, has incorporated all eight priority United Nations Millennium Development Goals so as to provide us with a blueprint for government action towards achieving the vision of improving the livelihood of our people by 2022.

Despite all our best efforts and our limited success in many areas, we are restricted in our capacity to meet our objectives due to a multitude of problems that are affecting us simultaneously and that we cannot overcome on our own. As is the case with all developing countries, we are particularly at risk in times of global economic difficulties and are particularly vulnerable to disease and to the effects of changing weather patterns.

Weakening our efforts to meet our development challenges is the threat posed by multiple health hazards, including malaria and tuberculosis, but especially HIV/AIDS. AIDS continues to claim the lives of many of our people. No sector of development has been spared the ravaging impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with enormous strain placed on our financial and human resources as we make the required interventions. We are attacking the enemy on various fronts, with priority on prevention, care, counselling and treatment. Our National Emergency Response Committee has had some success with regard to home-based and community-based care for those already ill as a result of infection.

Unfortunately, we are currently experiencing an exodus of qualified nurses, who are being employed in the developed world. The exodus has adversely affected our capacity-building efforts. That exodus, together with other wider impacts of HIV/AIDS, has dealt our economy a heavy blow.

The Kingdom of Swaziland continues to make the welfare of children a priority in our development strategy. In that regard, both the Government and the private sector, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have responded with zeal and determination to the plight of orphans and other vulnerable children, resulting from the effects of the pandemic. The Government is providing bursaries for such children in order to ensure that their education is not disrupted. The Government and the business community, in partnership with NGOs, are providing school feeding schemes in order to improve their nutritional balance. We are also using our traditional structures to cater for their material and emotional needs; this includes the provision of local reporting structures to prevent the abuse of those children. The chiefdoms also provide fields where communities grow food for orphans and other vulnerable children.

Let me take this opportunity to express the most profound gratitude of the entire Swazi nation to the United Nations and to all our development partners for the support we continue to receive as we face that killer disease. The support we have received from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria continues to prop up and sustain our programmes and strategies in our fight against this scourge. Fellow members, we shall be forever grateful to you all.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is fully committed to the principles of good governance and the rule of law. The nation has just completed debating the Kingdom's draft constitution, and the draft will soon be submitted to Parliament for final consideration before the end of this year.

For more than 30 years, the Kingdom of Swaziland has been enjoying excellent relations with a nation which, despite an outstanding record in international development assistance and despite fulfilling every requirement for membership in the Organization, is nonetheless excluded from participation in the activities of the United Nations. I am referring here to the issue of the 23 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan, who are denied the right to contribute to the global initiatives undertaken by this world body. The Government and the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan have made enormous advances in economic, social and political terms, and they have shown themselves ready and able to share their experience and advice with all the nations of the world. The Kingdom of Swaziland, therefore, proposes to the Assembly that the time has come to revisit this issue so as to ensure the inclusion of the Republic of China on Taiwan in the activities of the United Nations and its associated agencies.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to express the deep gratitude of His Majesty the King, the Indlovukazi, the Government and the people of Swaziland to the United Nations and its agencies for the many programmes of assistance undertaken in the Kingdom of Swaziland since our independence.

We believe that the United Nations, as the only truly global Organization, remains the only hope for overcoming the many complex challenges facing the world today. Despite the setbacks, and despite the obstacles to achieving our collective aims, there can be no doubt that the world could be a more troubled place without the combined efforts of all of us. The Kingdom of Swaziland, therefore, takes great pride in reaffirming our commitment to the principles and ideals set out in the Charter, and we ask Almighty God to watch over and guide us in the challenging times ahead for our Organization.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Petros Molyviatis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece.

Mr. Molyviatis (Greece): Mr. President, I would like to begin by congratulating you upon your election to your challenging office. Under your able guidance, the Assembly will take forward its relentless pursuit of peace, security and prosperity throughout the world. I can assure you of Greece's unwavering support in your efforts. Our thanks go also to the outgoing president, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his exemplary efforts and achievements in revitalizing the work of the General Assembly, as well as on many other issues.

The Greek Government fully subscribes to the statement delivered two days ago by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union (EU) (see A/59/PV.3), as well as to the EU priorities presented to this General Assembly.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, events of great importance changed the world we live in. From the most shocking tragedy of 11 September 2001 to the bombing attacks in Madrid and the recent acts of unspeakable brutality in Beslan, a dark parade of acts of blind violence has caused immense human suffering.

This has increased our responsibility and cemented our will to work in solidarity for a safer, fairer world. Fighting international terrorism has become the most pressing task among our priorities. In that fight, we must prevail. Besides the scourge of terrorism, however, there are many other challenges and grave problems that afflict humanity. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human trafficking, organized crime, failing States, environmental catastrophes, social and economic crises, pandemic diseases, large-scale humanitarian disasters, hunger and poverty constitute the core problems we have to face in solidarity regardless of our geography, culture or religion.

Last year, the Secretary-General announced the creation of a High-Level Panel of eminent persons to assess the new threats and challenges and to suggest ways to deal with them, including through reform of the multilateral international system. We fully support those efforts. We are eager to contribute constructively, to the best of our ability, towards making the United Nations as effective as possible for the twenty-first century.

(*spoke in French*)

The major challenges and threats confronting us are a source of profound concern — for us and for the peoples we represent. Nonetheless, it is my conviction that, at any cost, we must avoid being drawn into pessimism and anxiety about the future. I share with millions of people worldwide the hope, optimism and determination that were recently seen during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens.

In Athens, athletes of the world devoted their efforts to a noble cause and showed us that competition does not necessarily mean tension, friction, crisis or conflict. To the contrary, they proved that the aspirations of all sides can not only coexist peacefully but can also lead to a strengthening of friendship, solidarity and cooperation among individuals and nations.

The ancient ideal of the Olympic Truce embodies modern humanity's hope for the peaceful settlement of the conflicts ravaging the world. The General Assembly has, on many occasions, unanimously endorsed the Olympic Truce and has appealed to Member States to respect it during the Games. It is now a question of transforming that appeal into a tangible reality.

(*spoke in English*)

Multilateral cooperation is the safest way to a better world. We all should contribute to the enhancement and effectiveness of the international multilateral system. In that context, Greece fully shares the view of the Secretary-General that we have to move rapidly from the existing culture of reaction to one of prevention.

The peaceful resolution of all disputes at an early stage, on the basis of the United Nations Charter, is of fundamental importance to my country. We strongly believe that the United Nations system of conflict prevention and its preventive potential should be further enhanced to respond better to future challenges.

Peace and development are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin. Persistent poverty cheats nations out of progress and provides a breeding ground for both internal and regional crises. Four years ago, with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, a landmark decision was taken to embark upon long-term global evolution. We committed ourselves to achieve by the year 2015 the Goals that were set. It would be a disgrace to mankind if we did not succeed in bringing about stable and sustainable development and in eradicating hunger and poverty.

However, there are growing indications that, despite some progress, we are lagging in fulfilling agreed targets. Collectively, we have to explore new, innovative ways of financing development. Particular attention should be paid to the development problems of Africa and of small island States.

In line with the Millennium Declaration, and despite the enormous outlay of resources necessary to finance the Olympic Games and their security, Greece has made a point of increasing its development assistance.

In the context of that effort, Greece welcomes the proposals to combat hunger and poverty made by the President of Brazil and co-sponsored by France, Chile, Argentina and Spain. We shall continue to work towards a constructive and effective system that will allow smooth cooperation between recipients and donors and between developing and developed countries.

A close look at Greece's immediate neighbourhood reveals that, despite the considerable progress made over the last few years, the situation still remains fragile in parts of the western Balkans. Unemployment and the lack of economic prospects are in some cases a social and political time bomb. The situation in Kosovo remains a source of instability.

With the proactive support and involvement of the international community, we are working hard to transform the Balkans into a region of democracy, peace, stability and prosperity, focused on a common European future. We believe that genuinely regional initiatives such as the South-East European Cooperation Process constitute the appropriate vehicle to enable participating countries to coordinate their efforts towards reform, progress and good neighbourliness.

In recent years, the climate of our bilateral relations with Turkey has been constantly improving. Both the Greek and the Turkish Governments have undertaken sincere efforts to set bilateral relations on a new track. We note with satisfaction the progress achieved so far in certain areas of our bilateral cooperation and express our determination to expand it further. It is in that spirit that we clearly support Turkey's European perspective.

In Cyprus, reunification remains our unwavering goal through a mutually agreed, lasting, fair and functional settlement, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and the plan of the Secretary-General and compatible with the European Union Community *acquis* and European Union principles.

During the last 30 years of military occupation of more than one third of the territory of Cyprus, Greece has strongly supported every attempt and initiative by the United Nations, including the most recent one, for the achievement of a just, viable and functional solution of the Cyprus problem. Unfortunately, the last round of talks did not lead to an agreed comprehensive solution. In the referendum, which followed in April, an overwhelming majority of Greek Cypriots rejected a specific version of the Annan plan, but they still deeply cherish the goal of a reunited island.

The international community can contribute decisively in that direction by keeping the window for a solution open and by avoiding any action which could lead to the deepening of the division of the island or could fail to provide incentives for its reunification.

The horizon over the Middle East remains dark. The Greek Government is convinced that only the implementation of the road map can lead to the two-State solution: Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. Half measures can only complicate matters and add new sources of tension. Essential progress in the peace process cannot be achieved without a comprehensive cessation of all kinds of violence, especially violence directed against civilians. Terrorism cannot be a weapon to achieve political goals, and terrorist attacks cannot be justified by any means.

As to Iraq, we are deeply committed to the territorial integrity and unity of the country in a federal system. We are deeply worried by the ongoing violence, and we hope for progress in the political process, which will lead to a stable and prosperous democratic country, allowing all of its citizens to enjoy the fruits of peace and exploit the country's enormous potential.

(*spoke in French*)

In the light of the great challenges on the African continent, we note with great satisfaction the dedication shown and the results achieved by the African Union, an organization that is only 3 years old. Greece and its European partners want to help to improve Africa's prospects through development assistance, humanitarian assistance and logistical support. Moreover, we support the prospect of strengthened political cooperation with African countries and with the continent's regional organizations.

I take this opportunity to express the congratulations of my Government and of the Greek people on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of democracy in the Republic of South Africa, a historic event of pan-African significance.

(*spoke in English*)

My country has applied for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2005-2006. I wish to express our deep appreciation to the members of the Group of Western European and other States for their endorsement. Elections are taking place in a few weeks' time. We are asking for the support of the Assembly, which we would greatly appreciate. Let me assure Members that we shall respect its mandate and that we remain strongly committed to contributing constructively to the maintenance of peace and security and to the preservation of the multilateral order.

Greece remains completely devoted to the promotion of democratic principles of government, the peaceful resolution of disputes, strict adherence to international law and respect for human rights. We are determined, should we be elected, to devote all our efforts and all our capacity to fulfilling that responsibility and honouring the trust of this Assembly of all nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Franco Frattini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy.

Mr. Frattini (Italy): This year's general debate unfolds against an international backdrop in which terrorist acts of great ferocity have become all too common. The latest, heinous form of terrorism is hostage-taking, which has caused deep sorrow to many of our nations. Again and again, the international community has been caught off guard, unable to respond quickly or effectively. New humanitarian catastrophes have afflicted some of the world's poorest peoples. Difficult stabilization processes are still under way in many regions where the international community is implementing United Nations resolutions.

Some areas of the world have seen economic and social progress. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that entire regions — especially in Africa — are crippled by poverty, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy. That is why Italy takes a leading role in combating those ills in multilateral forums and through bilateral means.

Our peoples demand security. We must join forces to strengthen international cooperation and to confront the common threat of terrorist organizations. The false prophets of terror are able to spread their message of death as a result of ignorance among cultures. To counter their distortions, we should mobilize people's consciences and strengthen dialogue among civilizations with different histories but shared values and a common belief in human dignity.

Peace and development — the agenda of security and human promotion — are related goals that require a coordinated approach carried out through multilateral institutions and in a spirit of equal partnership with developing countries. In that regard, I would like to stress the fundamental importance of a major event that will take place in 2005. That initiative will be a unique opportunity for a comprehensive review of progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

In our globalized, interdependent world, international organizations are expected to provide leadership not only through abstract formulations of general principles, but also through effective, shared initiatives supported by broad consensus. Our priority is to strengthen the multilateral system and to reinvigorate the role of the United Nations. That is the responsibility that the Secretary-General set out for us at the last session of the General Assembly. There are two conditions for success: a sounder understanding of the threats we face and a broad consensus on the policies aimed at confronting them. Effective multilateralism depends much more on political will and shared goals than on structures and procedures.

The multilateral system — which demands responsibility and commitment — is judged by the results it enables us to achieve. That is why the whole international community must be involved, starting with the States that command greater resources and capabilities. Multilateral decisions can be difficult, but that is no excuse for inaction.

The starting point for United Nations reform is a review of the Organization's policies. Italy welcomes the reform of United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding, which we — as the sixth largest contributor to the United Nations budget and one of the top contributors of troops to peacekeeping operations over the past 10 years — support. Strengthening that critical sector will help to prevent the recurrence of conflicts, to consolidate the gains of peace, to re-establish the rule of law and to guarantee freedom for all. Italy will also continue to support the growing financial, operational and training demands of new missions, particularly in Africa — here, I am also thinking about the New Partnership for Africa's Development — and elsewhere.

Crisis management is a United Nations priority that demands greater coordination of its components and a stronger commitment on the part of Member States to protect human beings and to uphold their dignity. We thus look forward to the report of the Panel of Eminent Personalities appointed by the Secretary-General. The membership will have to examine it and discuss its recommendations thoroughly and openly.

A firm agreement on the policies of the United Nations must be upheld by institutions that enjoy the consensus and participation of the membership. We are encouraged by the results achieved so far with regard to improving the functioning of the General Assembly.

On Security Council reform, we have not yet been able to find an agreement that reconciles the various approaches on the table. That should not deter us from seeking solutions that are not divisive. Any decision imposed upon Member States would seriously undermine the credibility of the Council and the legitimacy of its action. Confronted with global challenges of great magnitude, the international community cannot afford profound divisions within its ranks.

Italy is in favour of a Security Council reform inspired by the principles of greater inclusiveness, effectiveness, democratic participation and geographic representation, starting with the developing countries. We are firmly convinced that the best way to pursue such a reform is to establish new non-permanent seats. Since States would occupy those seats on the basis of periodic elections, they would be accountable to the general membership.

Some Member States, however, have advocated the addition of new permanent seats — for themselves. We do not believe the Council's difficulties can be resolved through new permanent, irrevocable appointments and national mandates. Such a move would sow division, frustration, and perhaps disengagement, among the membership. Important areas of the world would be left without representation. For one, there would be no seat at the Council table for the Arab and Islamic world. Can the international community really afford this at a time when we are trying to broaden the dialogue among different faiths and cultures?

On the other hand, if a broad consensus emerges with full respect for the sovereign equality of all Member States, we are willing to contemplate more frequent rotation or longer terms for countries that make a greater contribution to the objectives of the United Nations. Should reflections of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change be driven by such a bold and innovative approach, we would strongly support their endeavour. I am convinced that many other countries would also be ready to accept it.

In addition, a closer relationship should be built between elected members and their regional groups. That would enhance the accountability of elected members and would make the Council more representative and its deliberations more legitimate.

Already in San Francisco in 1945 the founding fathers recognized the importance of regional organizations, whose relations with the United Nations are governed by Chapter VIII of the Charter, and whose role has grown steadily in the years that followed. Increasingly, States belonging to the same region have felt a sense of common responsibility for crises affecting them all. Moreover, regional arrangements provide small to mid-size States with a greater say in the decisions of international forums.

More should be done to express those realities at the United Nations and in the Security Council. As a founding member of the European Union, the depositary of its treaties and the host for the solemn signature of the new European Constitution, Italy believes that today's 25-member European Union has a fundamental contribution to make to the objectives of the United Nations. We have always worked to allow the European Union to speak with a single, more influential, voice. We realize, of course, that we are dealing with a gradual process. Nevertheless, we must stay the course and not jeopardize the achievement of our goal in the interests of all Europeans.

Let me conclude with a final, strong appeal to States Members. Let us join forces, abandon national ambitions and seek the least divisive ways to enhance multilateralism. That is the only way the international community can meet the global challenges of the new millennium. In deciding between the satisfaction of the few and the inclusion of the many, the wrong choice is a luxury that the United Nations — at the very heart of the international system — can ill afford to make.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Michel Barnier, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France.

Mr. Barnier (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. We are pleased that a man of your ability, a Francophone representative of a friendly country, is directing our proceedings.

I also wish to warmly applaud our Secretary-General. We have heard his message on respect for the rule of law. And through the Secretary-General, I wish to commend the entire staff of this institution, here and everywhere in the world: their courage and commitment are a credit to our ideals and to the organizations they serve — sadly, sometimes at the cost of their own lives.

How are we to meet the challenges facing the world? That is the question we all keep asking ourselves, one after another, from this rostrum. And how are we to meet the world's expectations unless we all mobilize? More than ever, the United Nations remains the one irreplaceable, legitimate framework for harnessing that mobilization and translating it into collective action.

We have much to do: conflicts remain unresolved, while others are breaking out; poverty is declining all too slowly; people are destroyed by wars; refugees are torn from their land; and the threat of terrorism is not fading. Yes, we have much to do. Yes, we have a duty to act, and an obligation never to give up.

The United Nations is acting — on all fronts, on the front line. To resolve conflicts and prevent them from flaring up again, it is present everywhere, on all continents, in Haiti, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan and many other fronts, deploying over 50,000 Blue Helmets. It provides assistance to 17 million people protected by the High Commissioner for Refugees. Through the World Food Programme, it feeds more than 100 million individuals. And it helps, especially through the United Nations Development Programme, 170 States or territories to develop.

United Nations activities — our activities — continue to expand. Thus, the Organization is called upon to be at the centre of the counter-terrorism measures that the international community is putting in place. The threat of terrorism, now a global one, calling for a global response. That is why France committed itself here to the fight, and did so again recently by supporting the strengthening of the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

The tragedy of 11 September, which I refer to with feeling here in New York City, was an attack on us all. Since then, terrorism has continued to strike: in Europe, in Madrid, six months ago; and in Asia, in Bali and Jakarta. Cowardly attacks are mounted against the weakest. How can we not be appalled at the tragedy of the school in Beslan where children — the symbol of innocence — were violently massacred?

We are waging a merciless fight against terrorism. Let us at the same time address its roots. That means putting an end to situations that terrorists exploit; giving the world's excluded hope again; restoring dignity to those peoples deprived of it; and ensuring that dialogue and cooperation among civilizations, cultures and religions prevail, rather than conflict and intolerance.

Global threats require a strong, and always collective, response. The threat of proliferation, which could merge with that of terrorism, calls for resolute and sustained action. The non-proliferation regime has been seriously undermined by the combined action of certain States and non-State actors. That is why strengthening existing instruments is today essential. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference in 2005 will be an opportunity to do so.

A safer and freer world is, first, a more just world. That is why we must act relentlessly to resolve conflicts. I am, of course, thinking, first and foremost, of the Middle East, where — in the wake of the hopes raised by Madrid, Oslo, Camp David and Taba — the absence of any prospect is today breeding despair, extremism and violence of every kind. This central crisis can be resolved only through a negotiated settlement based on international law, enabling all the peoples — I repeat, all the peoples — of the region to live in dignity and security.

The road map, which the parties have accepted and which the Security Council has endorsed, must be implemented in full and in good faith. France hopes that the withdrawal from Gaza is a first step in that direction. It will make every effort to get the peace process under way again. It will continue to act vis-à-vis all the leaders — the elected and legitimate leaders — of that region.

Let us make no mistake: building peace in the Middle East is a historic responsibility for our generation. Europe — the European Union — in partnership with the United States, Russia and the United Nations, is determined to play a political role in order to stimulate this process.

In Iraq, violence is exploding. It seems to us that only when the Iraqis themselves take control of their future, and when the political process provided for by the Security Council is pursued, will the country be able to escape the chaos that is destabilizing the entire region. France, as everyone knows, did not approve of the conditions in which the conflict was unleashed. Neither today nor tomorrow will it commit itself militarily in Iraq. However, it reaffirms its willingness, with its European partners, to assist the Iraqi people in rebuilding their country and in restoring their institutions.

Who can fail to see that, in the Middle East, everything is fragile and everything is interconnected? Who can fail to understand that the only path — everywhere — is sovereignty and justice for peoples? Only then will they make progress towards peace and the economic and political modernization to which they are entitled.

Africa, too, is where we will win or lose the battle for justice. Without justice, there will be no peace. Without peace, there will be no lasting development. The future of the African continent, and its stability and development, are a vital objective for us all.

Today, with the impetus of the United Nations, longstanding crises have been, or will be, settled — Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Others, however, have broken out, and together we must prevent them from worsening or spreading: in Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, and Darfur. The Great Lakes region is slow to find the path to peace, just as the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is slow to die, and the Somali question remains to be resolved.

On that great continent, which is undergoing profound change, facing real threats but also considerable potential, political leaders are today demonstrating a genuine determination to commit to working to resolve conflicts and crises. That can be seen from the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the resolute commitment of the African Union on the political front and in the field; and the growing role of regional organizations. We resolutely support that commitment. For development, but also for peace-building, we wish to bring about the conditions for an effective and coherent partnership between North and South.

Given the magnitude of the goals and needs of the continent, I firmly believe in the importance of pooling the efforts of the Europeans with those of our African partners, under United Nations auspices, whenever necessary. I am convinced that our experience of European integration — without attempting to teach any lessons — can simply be useful to that continent, and that is the sense of the statement made on our behalf by the representative of the presidency of the European Union, Bernard Bot, before the Assembly the day before yesterday.

France has long been involved in strengthening African peacekeeping capacities. Today, the European Union intends to make a commitment immediately and with determination. Operation Artemis, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is proof of that commitment. The creation of the European Peace Facility now provides major support to African organizations. We are willing, if the African Union so wishes, to assist it in its action for peace, as in the Sudan.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Justice and conflict prevention cannot be dissociated from collective action to promote development. The Millennium Goals — to which the developing countries, donor States and multilateral institutions are committed — are an overriding obligation for us all, especially the wealthiest countries.

More than $50 billion a year is still needed to achieve those objectives — a fact of which we all are aware. On Monday, 100-odd countries endorsed the New York Declaration on Action Against Hunger and Poverty. Together they ask that additional resources be provided for development, including through innovative mechanisms. This is a powerful movement, launched in this very forum of the United Nations, aimed at generating the necessary resources for justice and for development. It is an important milestone. My country is proud to have contributed to it, through the voice of the President of the Republic, and it will continue to do so.

But France is also fighting for a more controlled, and therefore most just, globalization that would give everyone a chance. We advocate the establishment of a political body, in which the United Nations must have its due place — to improve coordination of multilateral action in the economic, social and environmental fields and to provide the necessary impetus. This is one of the major issues that we must consider in coming months, especially on the basis of the proposals that the Panel on reform is expected to make.

Again, a more just world is a world that respects human dignity and freedom. Fundamental human rights are universal. Each man, woman and child has these inherent rights, and it is up to us to see that they thrive and are respected.

It is also up to us to fight firmly and uncompromisingly against all manifestations of violence and discrimination based on race, origin, gender or religion. Our resolve in the area of human rights, as elsewhere, must remain absolute and constant. I mean that we need a genuine dialogue with the civil society and with all non-governmental organizations. The time has come, it seems to us, to conclude the negotiation of a conventional instrument on forced disappearances, to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and to mobilize against all forms of modern slavery.

Let us not rule out the use of force, in certain cases and on the appeal of victims, to prevent massive human rights violations and acts of violence against civilians. The Security Council has the honour of assuming this responsibility, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

Let us also continue putting in place mechanisms to combat impunity, often the prerequisite for durable peace and lasting reconciliation. The establishment of the International Criminal Court specifically meets this objective. We welcome the major milestone reached with the entry into force of the Rome Statute.

The dignity of humankind and peoples also requires due respect for cultures in their diversity. The sense of loss of identity contributes to the frustrations that breed a good many conflicts. The unity of the international community, it goes without saying, cannot be synonymous with uniformity.

The negotiation of a convention on cultural diversity, which has just started at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is, therefore, in our view, a key objective. It must produce a concrete result, as planned, before the 2005 general conference.

Our planet is dangerous; it is also in danger. The earth is showing signs of strain; we are not maintaining it; in fact, we are plundering it; the climate is deteriorating. And yet, we should remember, scarcity of resources has at all times been a factor in conflict. For the future of our children, we must act while there is still time.

Is there among us, for that matter, one single issue that more obviously ignores borders than ecology and ecological security and requires coordinated action — that is, multilateral action? International governance in environmental matters is, it seems to us, inadequate today. We must simplify and strengthen the existing international regime on environmental issues, develop monitoring, and early warning expertise, and increase financing, especially for developing countries.

Let us be clear-sighted. For the environment, as for so many other issues, prevention costs less than cure. In this regard, we hope the establishment of a United Nations organization for the environment will be considered, based on the achievements of the United Nations Environment Programme. We propose that this great undertaking, which is one of the Millennium Goals, be on the agenda of the September 2005 summit.

In a world — our world — where 800 million people do not have enough to eat, where more financial resources are devoted to weapons than to development, where millions of men, women and children are forced to leave their land to escape destitution or massacres, the international community has a duty to act and to show imagination. It is here at the United Nations where we can meet to take initiatives, to fight misfortune and to apportion the tasks, all of them urgent.

The United Nations system, which is unique and more indispensable than ever, also has an obligation to reform itself to meet new needs and new threats, and to make the most of new technologies merely in order to live in our times. The Secretary-General got down to this problem at the start of his first mandate. Considerable work has already been done. The proposals of the high-level panel will be the basis for the next, still more ambitious, stages. France has made proposals on many issues, such as peacekeeping operations, human rights and development financing.

We have also indicated, with Germany, how the representativity and legitimacy of Security Council action might be improved. We advocate enlargement in both categories of members, permanent and non-permanent; and we have expressed support for the aspirations of Germany, Japan, Brazil and India, which should be accompanied by a country from Africa.

In a complex and unpredictable world, it is our joint responsibility to maintain and strengthen the one institution where all nations can work together, where they can unite to shape and control their common destiny. Through its legitimacy and ever-increasing effectiveness, the United Nations must be the instrument of universal conscience for which it remains the crucible.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. M. Morshed Khan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Khan (Bangladesh): Sir, allow me to congratulate you most warmly on your well-deserved election. I am confident you will build upon the excellent work done by your predecessor, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, and lead us to a very successful outcome of this session. Special tribute is due to our Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his dedicated leadership.

In Bangladesh, we believe that the United Nations provides an essential political and diplomatic framework for the actions of all its Members, including the most powerful. The use of force without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council cannot render the United Nations meaningless. We laud the United Nations for its strong advocacy against unilateralism in the interest of a just global order. Our spontaneous endorsement of this principle is in conformity with the fundamentals of our foreign policy.

The United Nations is not only a system for providing collective security. It is also a comprehensive international network of systems. It deals with the work of myriad specialized agencies, establishing norms, standards, codes and guidelines and buttressing the rule of law and the rights of individuals. It embraces the world's trading, financial and monetary systems and promotes the cause of development. In our globalized world, there is no substitute for the United Nations. It is the only forum that can deal with the cooperative management of problems that recognize no frontiers.

The thirtieth anniversary of our admission to the United Nations this year marks a major milestone in our partnership with the Organization. It is a sobering moment as much as it is one for rejoicing; for it is a record of our progress as a sovereign independent State. From the very outset, Bangladesh pursued two pre-eminent objectives, strengthening responsibility at home and enhancing our contribution abroad. Our relationship with the United Nations has been mutually rewarding in promoting peace and advancing development.

Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman laid the foundations of our national development in the late 1970s. His philosophy embraced reinforcing democracy with development. Our achievements are largely due to this pursuit. It reflects our commitment to human rights, good governance and empowerment of the poor, especially women. Innovative ideas flowing from our own intellectual resources were harnessed, with the cooperation and support of our development partners and, of course, the United Nations system. A free press and a vibrant civil society backed our efforts. The outcome was positive: it was to invoke what the World Bank described as the silent revolution that is Bangladesh. We are aware that much more remains to be done.

Natural disasters have often proved to be impediments to our development. The excessive flooding this year is a case in point. Two thirds of the country was under water, and many lives were lost. Over 2 million people became homeless and our infrastructure sustained severe damage. Better preparedness prevented greater losses. The courage and resilience of the Bangladeshi people in facing the situation were indeed remarkable. We deeply appreciate the support and solidarity that we received from the international community this time.

The peculiarities of our geography render flooding a seasonal occurrence. It is therefore imperative that we seek measures that will address this recurrent problem in a sustained and enduring manner, through proper management of the water resources in the region. In the final analysis, long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction measures also require international support.

Despite those occasional setbacks, we in Bangladesh can point to progress in a number of important social and economic fields. Poverty reduction has been a central goal. We have reduced population growth by half, curbed child mortality by a third, achieved food self-sufficiency for our people, improved sanitation standards with home-grown methods, and reduced ozone-depleting substances and vehicular pollution overall. Education has remained a major thrust of our Government's policy. Our school enrolment rates are among the highest in the developing world, particularly for girls. Free schooling for girl children, gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women have helped create a vibrant and progressive society. In addition, ideas like micro-credit and non-formal education have made famous beginnings in Bangladesh.

We would be happy to share our experiences with other comparable societies, and the United Nations can be an effective conduit for doing so. We encourage the United Nations in its role as a locator, collator and transmitter of best practices. That is how the United Nations can really help developing countries, by passing the litmus test of relevance, not in drafts and declarations alone but also in operations and implementation.

The past decade has witnessed many important United Nations conferences focused on our critical aspirations. The leaders of the world agreed on the Millennium Development Goals. However, the success of the Goals will largely depend on an enabling international economic environment, particularly in the areas of trade, finance, official development assistance and technology transfer.

Extreme poverty is a gross denial of human rights. The disturbing experiences of recent years, including the rise in senseless terrorism, warn us that failure in development is not an option, that poverty can breed extremism and that to rid the world of its tragic consequences effectively its root causes must be addressed.

In today's world, trade remains a crucial vanguard for development. Our active participation in the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development conforms to that maxim. Unhindered market access and special and preferential treatment for the products of developing countries should be at the heart of multilateral negotiations.

Managed migration is an important phenomenon. However, the root causes of cross-border migratory flows need to be addressed in earnest.

Greater focus must be placed on the full implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The goals of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Monterrey Consensus should be pursued with determination.

While it is important to set targets, it may be more important to create the means to achieve them. For the cause of development to progress, we need an environment of peace worldwide. Sadly, that is still lacking in many parts of the world.

We are concerned about the persistent violence in Iraq. We are encouraged by the return of the United Nations to the scene. We now expect the United Nations to play a central role in facilitating the democratic process and in the reconstruction and humanitarian work in that country.

In Afghanistan, the holding of a successful election next month will be critical to the country's stability.

Our people cherish their close bond of friendship with the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. We pray that their travails will be over soon.

A core issue in the Middle East remains the unresolved problem of Palestine. The Palestinians have suffered far too much for far too long, and the wall now only exacerbates that suffering. Perhaps there can be a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with an independent Palestine that has East Jerusalem as its capital. Until that is achieved, there must be respect for international law, and all peoples in the region must be able to live in peace and security, free from violence, destruction and acts of terror.

Wherever it has been possible, Bangladesh has not fought shy of contributing to post-conflict stability. We have always done so under the aegis of the United Nations. We are near the top of the list of participating countries with regard to peacekeeping. Over the past 20 years, we have been involved in 28 United Nations peacekeeping operations across 4 continents. Currently, we are participating in 12 of the 16 United Nations missions. We have done so because we see this as advancing our role and perception as a constructive and stabilizing international actor. We do not do it out of convenience; we do it out of our conviction.

We believe that there is a direct relationship between disarmament and development. Bangladesh is party to all major international conventions and treaties on disarmament. Our geographical location makes nuclear weapons a direct and legitimate cause for concern to us in the South Asia region. Bangladesh therefore supports all measures, partial and otherwise, towards arms control and conventional and nuclear disarmament.

Bangladesh has condemned international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We remain an active coalition partner in the war against terrorism.

Bangladesh has been playing an active role in many important committees and commissions of the United Nations. We believe that the reform of the General Assembly and the Security Council that is currently being discussed can truly help re-energize the system and enable those institutions to reflect the realities of the contemporary world. Consultations should be broad-based and should not be guided by the perceived interests of a few alone. Bangladesh believes that any increase in the membership of the Council should be based on certain criteria, including respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution and the aspirant's contribution to international peace and security, its proven track-record in democracy, its compliance with United Nations resolutions, its avowed commitment to nuclear disarmament, its profile as a major partner in development and its contribution as a voice of economically disadvantaged countries. Bangladesh believes that the ultimate focus of any reform exercise should be on enhancing the Council's credibility and democratic profile through its working methods and its decision-making processes.

The quest for world order must begin at our own doorstep. Bangladesh is committed to maintaining the credibility of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to provide its socio-economic mandate and to reduce tension and create a broad-based climate of confidence-building. Bangladesh will take over as chairperson of the thirteenth SAARC summit in January, next year. The occasion will mark the 20th anniversary of SAARC, and we look forward to celebrating the occasion with due solemnity as well as maintaining positive and forward-moving momentum. Our overarching commitment, of course, remains poverty alleviation. All in all, we aspire to expand our collective agenda for peace, progress and development in South Asia and beyond.

I firmly believe that nations big and small, weak and powerful, all need the United Nations as much as the United Nations needs them. It is only by combining our endeavours and uniting our resolve that we will be able to achieve our objectives of peace, security and development.

The power of humanity does not lie in the size of its armies but rather in the strength of its ideas, not in its ability to destroy but in its capability to build, not in its tendencies to despair, but in its propensities for hope. Our ability to tap this power for our own benefit will shape our future in these times marked by difficulties but also possibilities.

The meeting rose at 1.45 p.m.